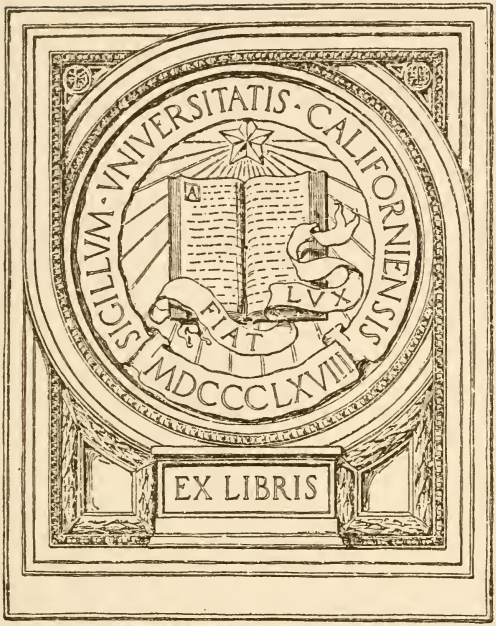
MONTES THE MATADOR
AND OTHER STORIES

FRANK HARRIS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MONTES THE MATADOR
AND OTHER STORIES

BY FRANK HARRIS

THE MAN SHAKESPEARE

THE BOMB

ELDER CONKLIN

MONTES THE MATADOR

MR. AND MRS. DAVENTRY

SHAKESPEARE AND HIS LOVE

MONTES
THE MATADOR

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

FRANK HARRIS

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MONTES, THE MATADOR

MONTES, THE MATADOR

YES! I'm better, and the doctor tells me I've escaped once more—as if I cared! . . . And all through the fever you came every day to see me, so my niece says, and brought me the cool drink that drove the heat away and gave me sleep. You thought, I suppose, like the doctor, that I'd escape you, too. Ha! ha! And that you'd never hear old Montes tell what he knows of bull-fighting and you don't. . . . Or perhaps it was kindness; though, why you, a foreigner and a heretic, should be kind to me, God knows. . . . The doctor says I've not got much more life in me, and you're going to leave Spain within the week—within the week, you said, didn't you? . . . Well, then, I don't mind telling you the story.

"Thirty years ago I wanted to tell it often enough, but I knew no one I could trust. After that fit passed, I said to myself I'd never tell it; but as you're going away, I'll tell it to you, if you swear by the Virgin you'll never tell it to any one, at least until I'm dead. You'll swear, will you? easily enough! they all will; but as you're going away, it's much the same. Besides, you can do nothing now; no one can do anything; they never could have done anything. Why, they wouldn't believe you if you told it to them, the fools! . . . My story will teach you more about

bull-fighting than Frascuelo or Mazzantini, or—yes, Lagartijo knows. Weren't there Frascuelos and Mazzantinis in my day? Dozens of them. You could pick one Frascuelo out of every thousand labourers if you gave him the training and the practice, and could keep him away from wine and women. But a Montes is not to be found every day, if you searched all Spain for one. . . . What's the good of bragging? I never bragged when I was at work: the deed talks—louder than any words. Yet I think, no one has ever done the things I used to do; for I read in a paper once an account of a thing I often did, and the writer said 'twas incredible. Ha, ha! incredible to the Frascuelos and Mazzantinis and the rest, who can kill bulls and are called *espadas*. Oh, yes! bulls so tired out they can't lift their heads. You didn't guess when you were telling me about Frascuelo and Mazzantini that I knew them. I knew all about both of them before you told me. I know their work, though I've not been within sight of a ring for more than thirty years. . . . Well, I'll tell you my story: I'll tell you my story—if I can."

The old man said the last words as if to himself in a low voice, then sank back in the armchair, and for a time was silent.

Let me say a word or two about myself and the circumstances which led me to seek out Montes.

I had been in Spain off and on a good deal, and from the first had taken a great liking to the people and country; and no one can love Spain and the Spaniards without becoming interested in the

bull-ring—the sport is so characteristic of the people, and in itself so enthralling. I set myself to study it in earnest, and when I came to know the best bull-fighters, Frascuelo, Mazzantini, and Lagartijo, and heard them talk of their trade, I began to understand what skill and courage, what qualities of eye and hand and heart, this game demands. Through my love of the sport, I came to hear of Montes. He had left so great a name that thirty years after he had disappeared from the scene of his triumphs, he was still spoken of not infrequently. He would perhaps have been better remembered, had the feats attributed to him been less astounding. It was Frascuelo who told me that Montes was still alive:

"Montes," he cried out in answer to me; "I can tell you about Montes. You mean the old *espada* who, they say, used to kill the bull in its first rush into the ring—as if any one could do that! I can tell you about him. He must have been clever; for an old *aficionado* I know, swears no one of us is fit to be in his *cuadrilla*. Those old fellows are all like that, and I don't believe half they tell about Montes. I dare say he was good enough in his day, but there are just as good men now as ever there were. When I was in Ronda, four years ago, I went to see Montes. He lives out of the town in a nice, little house all alone, with one woman to attend to him, a niece of his, they say. You know he was born in Ronda; but he would not talk to me; he only looked at me and laughed—the little, lame, conceited one!"

"You don't believe then, in spite of what they

say, that he was better than Lagartijo or Mazzantini," I asked.

"No, I don't," Frascuelo replied. "Of course, he may have known more than they do; that wouldn't be difficult, for neither of them knows much. Mazzantini is a good *matador* because he's very tall and strong—that's his advantage. For that, too, the women like him, and when he makes a mistake and has to try again, he gets forgiven. It wasn't so when I began. There were *aficionados* then, and if you made a mistake they began to jeer, and you were soon pelted out of the ring. Now the crowd knows nothing and is no longer content to follow those who do know. Lagartijo? Oh! he's very quick and daring, and the women and boys like that, too. But he's ignorant: he knows nothing about a bull. Why, he's been wounded oftener in his five years than I in my twenty. And that's a pretty good test. Montes must have been clever; for he's very small and I shouldn't think he was ever very strong, and then he was lame almost from the beginning, I've heard. I've no doubt he could teach the business to Mazzantini or Lagartijo, but that's not saying much. . . . He must have made a lot of money, too, to be able to live on it ever since. And they didn't pay as high then or even when I began as they do now."

So much I knew about Montes when, in the spring of 188—, I rode from Seville to Ronda, fell in love with the place at first sight, and resolved to stop at Polos' inn for some time. Ronda is built, so to speak, upon an island tableland high

above the sea-level, and is ringed about by still higher mountain ranges. It is one of the most peculiar and picturesque places in the world. A river runs almost all round it; and the sheer cliffs fall in many places three or four hundred feet, from the tableland to the water, like a wall. No wonder that the Moors held Ronda after they had lost every other foot of ground in Spain. Taking Ronda as my headquarters I made almost daily excursions, chiefly on foot, into the surrounding mountains. On one of these I heard again of Montes. A peasant with whom I had been talking and who was showing me a short cut back to the town, suddenly stopped and said, pointing to a little hut perched on the mountain-shoulder in front of us, "From that house you can see Ronda. That's the house where Montes, the great *matador*, was born," he added, evidently with some pride. Then and there the conversation with Frascuelo came back to my memory, and I made up my mind to find Montes out and have a talk with him. I went to his house, which lay just outside the town, next day with the *alcalde*, who introduced me to him and then left us. The first sight of the man interested me. He was short—about five feet three or four, I should think—of well-knit, muscular frame. He seemed to me to have Moorish blood in him. His complexion was very dark and tanned; the features clean-cut; the nose sharp and inquisitive; the nostrils astonishingly mobile; the chin and jaws square, boney—resolute. His hair and thick moustache were snowwhite, and this, together with the deep wrinkles on the forehead and

round the eyes and mouth, gave him an appearance of great age. He seemed to move, too, with extreme difficulty, his lameness, as he afterwards told me, being complicated with rheumatism. But when one looked at his eyes, the appearance of age vanished. They were large and brown, usually inexpressive, or rather impenetrable, brooding wells of unknown depths. But when anything excited him, the eyes would suddenly flash to life and become intensely luminous. The effect was startling. It seemed as if all the vast vitality of the man had been transmuted into those wonderful gleaming orbs: they radiated courage, energy, intellect. Then as his mood changed, the light would die out of the eyes, and the old, wizened, wrinkled face would settle down into its ordinary, ill-tempered, wearied expression. There was evidently so much in the man—courage, melancholy, keen intelligence—that in spite of an anything but flattering reception I returned again and again to the house. One day his niece told me that Montes was in bed, and from her description I inferred that he was suffering from an attack of malarial fever. The doctor who attended him, and whom I knew, confirmed this. Naturally enough I did what I could for the sufferer, and so it came about that after his recovery he received me with kindness, and at last made up his mind to tell me the story of his life.

"I may as well begin at the beginning," Montes went on. "I was born near here about sixty years ago. You thought I was older. Don't deny it. I saw the surprise in your face. But it's true:

in fact, I am not yet, I think, quite sixty. My father was a peasant with a few acres of land of his own and a cottage."

"I know it," I said. "I saw it the other day."

"Then you may have seen on the further side of the hill the pasture-ground for cattle which was my father's chief possession. It was good pasture; very good. . . . My mother was of a better class than my father; she was the daughter of the chemist in Ronda; she could read and write, and she did read, I remember, whenever she could get the chance, which wasn't often, with her four children to take care of—three girls and a boy—and the house to look after. We all loved her, she was so gentle; besides, she told us wonderful stories; but I think I was her favourite. You see I was the youngest and a boy, and women are like that. My father was hard—at least, I thought him so, and feared rather than loved him; but the girls got on better with him. He never talked to me as he did to them. My mother wanted me to go to school and become a priest; she had taught me to read and write by the time I was six. But my father would not hear of it. 'If you had had three boys and one girl,' I remember him saying to her once, 'you could have done what you liked with this one. But as there is only one boy, he must work and help me.' So by the time I was nine I used to go off down to the pasture and watch the bulls all day long. For though the herd was a small one—only about twenty head—it required to be constantly watched. The cows were

attended to in an enclosure close to the house. It was my task to mind the bulls in the lower pasture. Of course I had a pony, for such bulls in Spain are seldom approached, and cannot be driven by a man on foot. I see you don't understand. But it's simple enough. My father's bulls were of good stock, savage and strong; they were always taken for the ring, and he got high prices for them. He generally managed to sell three *novillos* and two bulls of four years old each year. And there was no bargaining, no trouble; the money was always ready for that class of animal. All day long I sat on my pony, or stood near it, minding the bulls. If any of them strayed too far, I had to go and get him back again. But in the heat of the day they never moved about much, and that time I turned to use by learning the lessons my mother gave me. So a couple of years passed. Of course in that time I got to know our bulls pretty well; but it was a remark of my father which first taught me that each bull had an individual character and first set me to watch them closely. I must have been then about twelve years old; and in that summer I learned more than in the two previous years. My father, though he said nothing to me, must have noticed that I had gained confidence in dealing with the bulls; for one night, when I was in bed, I heard him say to my mother —'The little fellow is as good as a man now.' I was proud of his praise, and from that time on, I set to work to learn everything I could about the bulls.

"By degrees I came to know every one of them

—better far than I ever got to know men or women later. Bulls, I found, were just like men, only simpler and kinder; some were good-tempered and honest, others were sulky and cunning. There was a black one which was wild and hot-tempered, but at bottom good, while there was one almost as black, with light horns and flanks, which I never trusted. The other bulls didn't like him. I could see they didn't; they were all afraid of him. He was cunning and suspicious, and never made friends with any of them; he would always eat by himself far away from the others—but he had courage, too; I knew that as well as they did. He was sold that very summer with the black one for the ring in Ronda. One Sunday night, when my father and eldest sister (my mother would never go to *los toros*) came back from seeing the game in Ronda, they were wild with excitement, and began to tell the mother how one of our bulls had caught the *matador* and tossed him, and how the *chulos* could scarcely get the *matador* away. Then I cried out —'I know; 'twas Judas' (so I had christened him), and as I saw my father's look of surprise I went on confusedly, 'the bull with the white horns I mean. Juan, the black one, wouldn't have been clever enough.' My father only said, 'The boy's right'; but my mother drew me to her and kissed me, as if she were afraid. . . . Poor mother! I think even then she knew or divined something of what came to pass later. . . .

"It was the next summer, I think, that my father first found out how much I knew about the bulls. It happened in this way. There hadn't

been much rain in the spring, the pasture, therefore, was thin, and that, of course, made the bulls restless. In the summer the weather was unsettled —spells of heat and then thunderstorms—till the animals became very excitable. One day, there was thunder in the air I remember, they gave me a great deal of trouble and that annoyed me, for I wanted to read. I had got to a very interesting tale in the story-book my mother had given me on the day our bulls were sold. The story was about Cervantes—ah, you know who I mean, the great writer. Well, he was a great man, too. The story told how he escaped from the prison over there in Algiers and got back to Cadiz, and how a widow came to him to find out if he knew her son, who was also a slave of the Moors. And when she heard that Cervantes had seen her son working in chains, she bemoaned her wretchedness and ill-fortune, till the heart of the great man melted with pity, and he said to her, 'Come, mother, be hopeful, in one month your son shall be here with you.' And then the book told how Cervantes went back to slavery, and how glad the Bey was to get him again, for he was very clever; and how he asked the Bey, as he had returned of his free will, to send the widow's son home in his stead; and the Bey consented. That Cervantes was a man! . . . Well, I was reading the story, and I believed every word of it, as I do still, for no ordinary person could invent that sort of tale; and I grew very much excited and wanted to know all about Cervantes. But as I could only read slowly and with difficulty, I was afraid the sun would go down

before I could get to the end. While I was reading as hard as ever I could, my father came down on foot and caught me. He hated to see me reading—I don't know why; and he was angry and struck at me. As I avoided the blow and got away from him, he pulled up the picket line, and got on my pony to drive one of the bulls back to the herd. I have thought since, he must have been very much annoyed before he came down and caught me. For though he knew a good deal about bulls, he didn't show it then. My pony was too weak to carry him easily, yet he acted as if he had been well mounted. For as I said, the bulls were hungry and excited, and my father should have seen this and driven the bull back quietly and with great patience. But no; he wouldn't let him feed even for a moment. At last the bull turned on him. My father held the goad fairly against his neck, but the bull came on just the same, and the pony could scarcely get out of the way in time. In a moment the bull turned and prepared to rush at him again. My father sat still on the little pony and held the goad; but I knew that was no use; he knew it too; but he was angry and wouldn't give in. At once I ran in between him and the bull, and then called to the bull, and went slowly up to him where he was shaking his head and pawing the ground. He was very angry, but he knew the difference between us quite well, and he let me come close to him without rushing at me, and then just shook his head to show me he was still angry, and soon began to feed quietly. In a moment or two I left him and went back to my

father. He had got off the pony and was white and trembling, and he said,

"'Are you hurt?'

"And I said laughing, 'No: he didn't want to hurt me. He was only showing off his temper.'

"And my father said, 'There's not a man in all Spain that could have done that! You know more than I do—more than anybody.'

"After that he let me do as I liked, and the next two years were very happy ones. First came the marriage of my second sister; then the eldest one was married, and they were both good matches. And the bulls sold well, and my father had less to do, as I could attend to the whole herd by myself. Those were two good years. My mother seemed to love me more and more every day, or I suppose I noticed it more, and she praised me for doing the lessons she gave me; and I had more and more time to study as the herd got to know me better and better.

"My only trouble was that I had never seen the bulls in the ring. But when I found my father was willing to take me, and 'twas mother who wanted me not to go, I put up with that, too, and said nothing, for I loved her greatly. Then of a sudden came the sorrow. It was in the late winter, just before my fifteenth birthday. I was born in March, I think. In January my mother caught cold, and as she grew worse my father fetched the doctor, and then her father and mother came to see her, but nothing did any good. In April she died. I wanted to die too.

"After her death my father took to grumbling

about the food and house and everything. Nothing my sister could do was right. I believe she only married in the summer because she couldn't stand his constant blame. At any rate she married badly, a good-for-nothing who had twice her years, and who ill-treated her continually. A month or two later my father, who must have been fifty, married again, a young woman, a labourer's daughter without a *duro*. He told me he was going to do it, for the house needed a woman. I suppose he was right. But I was too young then to take such things into consideration, and I had loved my mother. When I saw his new wife I did not like her, and we did not get on well together.

"Before this, however, early in the summer that followed the death of my mother, I went for the first time to see a bull-fight. My father wanted me to go, and my sister, too; so I went. I shall never forget that day. The *chulos* made me laugh, they skipped about so and took such extra-good care of themselves; but the *banderilleros* interested me. Their work required skill and courage, that I saw at once; but after they had planted the *banderillas* twice, I knew how it was done, and felt I could do it just as well or better. For the third or fourth *banderillero* made a mistake! He didn't even know with which horn the bull was going to strike; so he got frightened, and did not plant the *banderillas* fairly—in fact, one was on the side of the shoulder and the other didn't even stick in. As for the *picadores*, they didn't interest me at all. There was no skill or knowledge in

their work. It was for the crowd, who liked to see blood and who understand nothing. Then came the turn of the *espada*. Ah! that seemed splendid to me. He knew his work I thought at first, and his work evidently required knowledge, skill, courage, strength—everything. I was intensely excited, and when the bull, struck to the heart, fell prone on his knees, and the blood gushed from his nose and mouth, I cheered and cheered till I was hoarse. But before the games were over, that very first day, I saw more than one *matador* make a mistake. At first I thought I must be wrong, but soon the event showed I was right. For the *matador* hadn't even got the bull to stand square when he tried his stroke and failed. You don't know what that means—'to stand square.'"

"I do partly," I replied, "but I don't see the reason of it. Will you explain?"

"It's very simple," Montes answered. "So long as the bull's standing with one hoof in front of the other, his shoulder-blades almost meet, just as when you throw your arms back and your chest out; they don't meet, of course, but the space between them is not as regular, and, therefore, not as large as it is when their front hooves are square. The space between the shoulder-blades is none too large at any time, for you have to strike with force to drive the sword through the inch-thick hide, and through a foot of muscle, sinew, and flesh besides to the heart. Nor is the stroke a straight one. Then, too, there's always the backbone to avoid. And the space between the backbone and the nearest thick gristle of the shoulder-blade is

never more than an inch and a half. So if you narrow this space by even half an inch you increase your difficulty immensely. And that's not your object. Well, all this I've been telling you, I divined at once. Therefore, when I saw the bull wasn't standing quite square I knew the *matador* was either a bungler or else very clever and strong indeed. In a moment he proved himself to be a bungler, for his sword turned on the shoulder-blade, and the bull, throwing up his head, almost caught him on his horns. Then I hissed and cried, 'Shame!' And the people stared at me. That butcher tried five times before he killed the bull, and at last even the most ignorant of the spectators knew I had been right in hissing him. He was one of your Mazzantinis, I suppose."

"Oh, no!" I replied, "I've seen Mazzantini try twice, but never five times. That's too much!"

"Well," Montes continued quietly, "the man who tries once and fails ought never to be allowed in a ring again. But to go on. That first day taught me I could be an *espada*. The only doubt in my mind was in regard to the nature of the bulls. Should I be able to understand new bulls—bulls, too, from different herds and of different race, as well as I understood our bulls? Going home that evening I tried to talk to my father, but he thought the sport had been very good, and when I wanted to show him the mistakes the *matadores* had made, he laughed at me, and, taking hold of my arm, he said, 'Here's where you need the gristle before you could kill a bull with a sword, even if he were tied for you.' My father was very

proud of his size and strength, but what he said had reason in it, and made me doubt myself. Then he talked about the gains of the *matadores.* A fortune, he said, was given for a single day's work. Even the pay of the *chulos* seemed to me to be extravagant, and a *banderillero* got enough to make one rich for life. That night I thought over all I had seen and heard, and fell asleep and dreamt I was an *espada,* the best in Spain, and rich, and married to a lovely girl with golden hair —as boys do dream.

"Next day I set myself to practice with our bulls. First I teased one till he grew angry and rushed at me; then, as a *chulo,* I stepped aside. And after I had practised this several times, I began to try to move aside as late as possible and only just as far as was needful; for I soon found out the play of horn of every bull we had. The older the bull the heavier his neck and shoulders become, and, therefore, the sweep of horns in an old bull is much smaller than a young one's. Before the first morning's sport was over I knew that with our bulls at any rate I could beat any *chulo* I had seen the day before. Then I set myself to quiet the bulls, which was a little difficult, and after I had succeeded I went back to my pony to read and dream. Next day I played at being a *banderillero,* and found out at once that my knowledge of the animal was all important. For I knew always on which side to move to avoid the bull's rush. I knew how he meant to strike by the way he put his head down. To plant the *banderillas* perfectly would have been child's play to me, at

least with our bulls. The *matador's* work was harder to practise. I had no sword; besides, the bull I wished to pretend to kill, was not tired and wouldn't keep quiet. Yet I went on trying. The game had a fascination for me. A few days later, provided with a makeshift red *capa*, I got a bull far away from the others. Then I played with him till he was tired out. First I played as a *chulo*, and avoided his rushes by an inch or two only; then, as *banderillero*, I escaped his stroke, and, as I did so, struck his neck with two sticks. When he was tired I approached him with the *capa* and found I could make him do what I pleased, stand crooked or square in a moment, just as I liked. For I learned at once that as a rule the bull rushes at the *capa* and not at the man who holds it. Some bulls, however, are clever enough to charge the man. For weeks I kept up this game, till one day my father expressed his surprise at the thin and wretched appearance of the bulls. No wonder! The pasture ground had been a ring to them and me for many a week.

"After this I had to play *matador*—the only part which had any interest for me—without first tiring them. Then came a long series of new experiences, which in time made me what I was, a real *espada*, but which I can scarcely describe to you.

"For power over wild animals comes to a man, as it were, by leaps and bounds. Of a sudden one finds he can make a bull do something which the day before he could not make him do. It is all a matter of intimate knowledge of the nature of the

animal. Just as the shepherd, as I've been told, knows the face of each sheep in a flock of a thousand, though I can see no difference between the faces of sheep, which are all alike stupid to me, so I came to know bulls, with a complete understanding of the nature and temper of each one. It's just because I can't tell you how I acquired this part of my knowledge that I was so long-winded in explaining to you my first steps. What I knew more than I have told you, will appear as I go on with my story, and that you must believe or disbelieve as you think best."

"Oh," I cried, "you've explained everything so clearly, and thrown light on so many things I didn't understand, that I shall believe whatever you tell me."

Old Montes went on as if he hadn't heard my protestation:

"The next three years were intolerable to me: my stepmother repaid my dislike with interest and found a hundred ways of making me uncomfortable, without doing anything I could complain of and get altered. In the spring of my nineteenth year I told my father I intended to go to Madrid and become an *espada*. When he found he couldn't induce me to stay, he said I might go. We parted, and I walked to Seville; there I did odd jobs for a few weeks in connection with the bull-ring, such as feeding the bulls, helping to separate them, and so forth; and there I made an acquaintance who was afterwards a friend. Juan Valdera was one of the *cuadrilla* of Girvalda, a *matador* of the ordinary type. Juan was from Estramadura, and

we could scarcely understand each other at first; but he was kindly and careless and I took a great liking to him. He was a fine man; tall, strong and handsome, with short, dark, wavy hair and dark moustache, and great black eyes. He liked me, I suppose, because I admired him and because I never wearied of hearing him tell of his conquests among women and even great ladies. Of course I told him I wished to enter the ring, and he promised to help me to get a place in Madrid where he knew many of the officials. 'You may do well with the *capa*,' I remember he said condescendingly, 'or even as a *banderillero*, but you'll never go further. You see, to be an *espada*, as I intend to be, you must have height and strength,' and he stretched his fine figure as he spoke. I acquiesced humbly enough. I felt that perhaps he and my father were right, and I didn't know whether I should ever have strength enough for the task of an *espada*. To be brief, I saved a little money, and managed to get to Madrid late in the year, too late for the bull-ring. Thinking over the matter I resolved to get work in a blacksmith's shop, and at length succeeded. As I had thought, the labour strengthened me greatly, and in the spring of my twentieth year, by Juan's help, I got employed on trial one Sunday as a *chulo*.

* * * * *

"I suppose," Montes went on, after a pause, "I ought to have been excited and nervous on that first Sunday—but I wasn't; I was only eager to do well in order to get engaged for the season. The blacksmith, Antonio, whom I had worked with,

had advanced me the money for my costume, and Juan had taken me to a tailor and got the things made, and what I owed Antonio and the tailor weighed on me. Well, on that Sunday I was a failure at first. I went in the procession with the rest, then with the others I fluttered my *capa;* but when the bull rushed at me, instead of running away, like the rest, I wrapped my *capa* about me and, just as his horns were touching me, I moved aside—not half a pace. The spectators cheered me, it is true, and I thought I had done very well, until Juan came over to me, and said:

"'You mustn't show off like that. First of all, you'll get killed if you play that game; and then you fellows with the *capa* are there to make the bull run about, to tire him out so that we *matadores* may kill him.'

"That was my first lesson in professional jealousy. After that I ran about like the rest, but without much heart in the sport. It seemed to me stupid. Besides, from Juan's anger and contempt, I felt sure I shouldn't get a permanent engagement. Bit by bit, however, my spirits rose again with the exercise, and when the fifth or sixth bull came in, I resolved to make him run. It was a good, honest bull; I saw that at once; he stood in the middle of the ring, excited, but not angry, in spite of the waving of the *capas* all round him. As soon as my turn came, I ran forward, nearer to him than the others had considered safe, and waved the challenge with my *capa.* At once he rushed at it, and I gave him a long run, half round the circle, and ended it by stopping and

letting him toss the *capa* which I held not quite at arm's length from my body. As I did this I didn't turn round to face him. I knew he'd toss the *capa* and not me, but the crowd rose and cheered as if the thing were extraordinary. Then I felt sure I should be engaged, and I was perfectly happy. Only Juan said to me a few minutes later:

"'You'll be killed, my boy, one of these fine days if you try those games. Your life will be a short one if you begin by trusting a bull.'

"But I didn't mind what he said. I thought he meant it as a friendly warning, and I was anxious only to get permanently engaged. And sure enough, as soon as the games were over, I was sent for by the director. He was kind to me, and asked me where I had played before. I told him that was my first trial.

"'Ah!' he said, turning to a gentleman who was with him, 'I knew it, Señor Duque; such courage always comes from—want of experience, let me call it.'

"'No,' replied the gentleman, whom I afterwards knew as the Duke of Medina Celi, the best *aficionado*, and one of the noblest men in Spain; 'I'm not so sure of that. Why,' he went on, speaking now to me, 'did you keep your back turned to the bull?'

"'Señor,' I answered, ''twas an honest bull, and not angry, and I knew he'd toss the *capa* without paying any attention to me.'

"'Well,' said the Duke, 'if you know that much, and aren't afraid to risk your life on your

knowledge, you'll go far. I must have a talk with you some day, when I've more time; you can come and see me. Send in your name; I shall remember.' And as he said this, he nodded to me and waved his hand to the director, and went away.

"Then and there the director made me sign an engagement for the season, and gave me one hundred *duros* as earnest money in advance of my pay. What an evening we had after that! Juan, the tailor, Antonio the blacksmith, and I. How glad and proud I was to be able to pay my debts and still have sixty *duros* in my pocket after entertaining my friends. If Juan had not hurt me every now and then by the way he talked of my foolhardiness, I should have told them all I knew; but I didn't. I only said I was engaged at a salary of a hundred *duros* a month.

"'What!' said Juan. 'Come, tell the truth; make it fifty.'

"'No,' I said; 'it was a hundred,' and I pulled out the money.

"'Well,' he said, 'that only shows what it is to be small and young and foolhardy! Here am I, after six years' experience, second, too, in the *cuadrilla* of Girvalda, and I'm not getting much more than that.'

"Still, in spite of such little drawbacks, in spite, too, of the fact that Juan had to go away early, to meet 'a lovely creature,' as he said, that evening was one of the happiest I ever spent.

"All that summer through I worked every Sunday, and grew in favour with the Madrileños, and

with the Madrileñas, though not with these in Juan's way. I was timid and young; besides, I had a picture of a woman in my mind, and I saw no one like it. So I went on studying the bulls, learning all I could about the different breeds, and watching them in the ring. Then I sent money to my sister and to my father, and was happy.

"In the winter I was a good deal with Antonio; every day I did a spell of work in his shop to strengthen myself, and he, I think, got to know that I intended to become an *espada*. At any rate, after my first performance with the *capa*, he believed I could do whatever I wished. He used often to say God had given him strength and me brains, and he only wished he could exchange some of his muscle for some of my wits. Antonio was not very bright, but he was good-tempered, kind, and hard-working, the only friend I ever had. May Our Lady give his soul rest!

"Next spring when the director sent for me, I said that I wanted to work as a *banderillero*. He seemed to be surprised, told me I was a favourite with the *capa*, and had better stick to that for another season at least. But I was firm. Then he asked me whether I had ever used the *banderillas* and where? The director always believed I had been employed in some other ring before I came to Madrid. I told him I was confident I could do the work. 'Besides,' I added, 'I want more pay,' which was an untruth; but the argument seemed to him decisive, and he engaged me at two hundred *duros* a month, under the condition that, if the spectators wished it, I should work now and

then with the *capa* as well. It didn't take me long to show the *aficionados* in Madrid that I was as good with the *banderillas* as I was with the *capa*. I could plant them when and where I liked. For in this season I found I could make the bull do almost anything. You know how the *banderillero* has to excite the bull to charge him before he can plant the darts. He does that to make the bull lower his head well, and he runs towards the bull partly so that the bull may not know when to toss his head up, partly because he can throw himself aside more easily when he's running fairly fast. Well, again and again I made the bull lower his head and then walked to him, planted the *banderillas*, and as he struck upwards swayed aside just enough to avoid the blow. That was an infinitely more difficult feat than anything I had ever done with the *capa*, and it gave me reputation among the *aficionados* and also with the *espadas;* but the ignorant herd of spectators preferred my trick with the *capa*. So the season came and went. I had many a carouse with Juan, and gave him money from time to time, because women always made him spend more than he got. From that time, too, I gave my sister fifty *duros* a month, and my father fifty. For before the season was half over my pay was raised to four hundred *duros* a month, and my name was always put on the bills. In fact I was rich and a favourite of the public.

"So time went on, and my third season in Madrid began, and with it came the beginning of the end. Never was any one more absolutely con-

tent than I when we were told *los toros* would begin in a fortnight. On the first Sunday I was walking carelessly in the procession beside Juan, though I could have been next to the *espadas*, had I wished, when he suddenly nudged me, saying:

"'Look up! there on the second tier; there's a face for you.'

"I looked up, and saw a girl with the face of my dreams, only much more beautiful. I suppose I must have stopped, for Juan pulled me by the arm crying: 'You're moonstruck, man; come on!' and on I went—lovestruck in heart and brain and body. What a face it was! The golden hair framed it like a picture, but the great eyes were hazel, and the lips scarlet, and she wore the *mantilla* like a queen. I moved forward like a man in a dream, conscious of nothing that went on round me, till I heard Juan say:

"'She's looking at us. She knows we've noticed her. All right, pretty one! we'll make friends afterwards.'

"'But how?' I asked, stupidly.

"'How!' he replied, mockingly. 'I'll just send some one to find out who she is, and then you can send her a box for next Sunday, and pray for her acquaintance, and the thing's done. I suppose that's her mother sitting behind her,' he went on. 'I wonder if the other girl next to her is the sister. She's as good-looking as the fair-haired one, and easier to win, I'd bet. Strange how all the timid ones take to me.' And again he looked up.

"I said nothing; nor did I look up at the place

where she was sitting; but I worked that day as I had never worked before. Then, for the first time, I did something that has never been done since by any one. The first bull was honest and kindly: I knew the sort. So, when the people began to call for *El Pequeño* (the little fellow)—that was the nickname they had given me—I took up a *capa*, and, when the bull chased me, I stopped suddenly, faced him, and threw the *capa* round me. He was within ten paces of me before he saw I had stopped, and he began to stop; but before he came to a standstill his horns were within a foot of me. He tossed his head once or twice as if he would strike me, and then went off. The people cheered and cheered as if they would never cease. Then I looked up at her. She must have been watching me, for she took the red rose from her hair and threw it into the ring towards me, crying, 'Bien! Muy bien! El Pequeño!'

"As I picked up the rose, pressed it to my lips, and hid it in my breast, I realized all that life holds of triumphant joy! . . . Then I made up my mind to show what I could do, and everything I did that day seemed to delight the public. At last, as I planted the *banderillas*, standing in front of the bull, and he tried twice in quick succession to strike me and failed, the crowd cheered and cheered and cheered, so that, even when I went away, after bowing and stood among my fellows, ten minutes passed before they would let the game go on. I didn't look up again. No! I wanted to keep the memory of what she looked like when she threw me the rose.

"After the games were over, I met her, that same evening. Juan had brought it about, and he talked easily enough to the mother and daughter and niece, while I listened. We all went, I remember, to a restaurant in the Puerta del Sol, and ate and drank together. I said little or nothing the whole evening. The mother told us they had just come from the north: Alvareda was the family name; her daughter was Clemencia, the niece, Liberata. I heard everything in a sort of fever of hot pulses and cold fits of humility, while Juan told them all about himself, and what he meant to do and to be. While Clemencia listened to him, I took my fill of gazing at her. At last Juan invited them all to *los toros* on the following Sunday, and promised them the best *palco* in the ring. He found out, too, where they lived, in a little street running parallel to the Alcala, and assured them of our visit within the week. Then they left, and as they went out of the door Liberata looked at Juan, while Clemencia chatted with him and teased him.

"'That's all right,' said Juan, turning to me when they were gone, 'and I don't know which is the more taking, the niece or Clemencia. Perhaps the niece; she looks at one so appealingly; and those who talk so with their eyes are always the best. I wonder have they any money. One might do worse than either with a good portion.'

"'Is that your real opinion?' I asked hesitatingly.

"'Yes,' he answered; 'why?'

"'Because, in that case leave Clemencia to me.

Of course you could win her if you wanted to. But it makes no difference to you, and to me all the difference. If I cannot marry her, I shall never marry.'

"'Gesu!' he cried, 'how fast you go, but I'd do more than that for you, Montes; and besides, the niece really pleases me better.'

"So the matter was settled between us.

"Now, if I could tell you all that happened, I would. But much escaped me at the time that I afterwards remembered, and many things that then seemed to me to be as sure as a straight stroke, have since grown confused. I only know that Juan and I met them often, and that Juan paid court to the niece, while I from time to time talked timidly to Clemencia.

"One Sunday after another came and went, and we grew to know each other well. Clemencia did not chatter like other women: I liked her the better for it, and when I came to know she was very proud, I liked that, too. She charmed me; why? I can scarcely tell. I saw her faults gradually, but even her faults appeared to me fascinating. Her pride was insensate. I remember one Sunday afternoon after the games, I happened to go into a restaurant, and found her sitting there with her mother. I was in costume and carried in my hand a great nosegay of roses that a lady had thrown me in the ring. Of course as soon as I saw Clemencia I went over to her and—you know it is the privilege of the *matadores* in Spain, even if they do not know the lady—taking a rose from the bunch I presented it to her as the fairest of the

fair. Coming from the cold North, she didn't know the custom and scarcely seemed pleased. When I explained it to her, she exclaimed that it was monstrous; she'd never allow a mere *matador* to take such a liberty unless she knew and liked him. Juan expostulated with her laughingly; I said nothing; I knew what qualities our work required, and didn't think it needed any defence. I believe in that first season, I came to see that her name Clemencia wasn't very appropriate. At any rate she had courage and pride, that was certain. Very early in our friendship she wanted to know why I didn't become an *espada*.

"'A man without ambition,' she said, 'was like a woman without beauty.'

"I laughed at this and told her my ambition was to do my work well, and advancement was sure to follow in due course. Love of her seemed to have killed ambition in me. But no. She wouldn't rest content in spite of Juan's telling her my position already was more brilliant than that of most of the *espadas*.

"'He does things with the *capa* and the *banderillas* which no *espada* in all Spain would care to imitate. And that's position enough. Besides, to be an *espada* requires height and strength.'

"As he said this she seemed to be convinced, but it annoyed me a little, and afterwards as we walked together, I said to her,

"'If you want to see me work as an *espada*, you shall.'

"'Oh, no!' she answered half carelessly; 'if

you can't do it, as Juan says, why should you try? to fail is worse than to lack ambition.'

"'Well,' I answered, 'you shall see.'

"And then I took my courage in both hands and went on:

"'If you cared for me I should be the first *espada* in the world next season.'

"She turned and looked at me curiously and said,

"'Of course I'd wish it if you could do it.'

"And I said, 'See, I love you as the priest loves the Virgin; tell me to be an *espada* and I shall be one for the sake of your love.'

"'That's what all men say, but love doesn't make a man tall and strong.'

"'No; nor do size and strength take the place of heart and head. Do you love me? That's the question.'

"'I like you, yes. But love—love, they say, comes after marriage."

"'Will you marry me?'

"'Become an *espada* and then ask me again,' she answered coquettishly.

"The very next day I went to see the Duke of Medina Celi; the servants would scarcely let me pass till they heard my name and that the Duke had asked me to come. He received me kindly. I told him what I wanted.

"'Have you ever used the sword?' he asked in surprise. 'Can you do it? You see we don't want to lose the best man with *capa* and *banderillas* ever known, to get another second-class *espada*.'

"And I answered him,

"'Señor Duque, I have done better with the *banderillas* than I could with the *capa*. I shall do better with the *espada* than with the *banderillas*.'

"'You little fiend!' he laughed, 'I believe you will, though it is unheard of to become an *espada* without training; but now for the means. All the *espadas* are engaged; it'll be difficult. Let me see. . . . The Queen has asked me to superintend the sports early in July, and then I shall give you your chance. Will that do? In the meantime, astonish us all with *capa* and *banderillas*, so that men may not think me mad when I put your name first on the bill.'

"I thanked him from my heart, as was his due, and after a little more talk I went away to tell Clemencia the news. She only said:

"'I'm glad. Now you'll get Juan to help you.'

"I stared at her.

"'Yes!' she went on, a little impatiently; 'he has been taught the work; he's sure to be able to show you a great deal.'

"I said not a word. She was sincere, I saw, but then she came from the North and knew nothing. I said to myself, 'That's how women are!'

"She continued, 'Of course you're clever with the *capa* and *banderillas*, and now you must do more than ever, as the Duke said, to deserve your chance.' And then she asked carelessly, 'Couldn't you bring the Duke and introduce him to us some time or other? I should like to thank him.'

"And I, thinking it meant our betrothal, was

glad, and promised. And I remember I did bring him once to the box and he was kind in a way, but not cordial as he always was when alone with me, and he told Clemencia that I'd go very far, and that any woman would be lucky to get me for a husband, and so on. And after a little while he went away. But Clemencia was angry with him and said he put on airs, and, indeed, I had never seen him so cold and reserved; I could say little or nothing in his defence.

"Well, all that May I worked as I had never done. The Director told me he knew I was to use the *espada* on the first Sunday in July, and he seemed to be glad; and one or two of the best *espadas* came to me and said they'd heard the news and should be glad to welcome me among them. All this excited me, and I did better and better. I used to pick out the old prints of Goya, the great painter—you know his works are in the Prado—and do everything the old *matadores* did, and invent new things. But nothing 'took' like my trick with the *capa*. One Sunday, I remember, I had done it with six bulls, one after the other, and the people cheered and cheered. But the seventh was a bad bull, and, of course, I didn't do it. And afterwards Clemencia asked me why I didn't, and I told her. For you see I didn't know then that women rate high what they don't understand. Mystery is everything to them. As if the explanation of such a thing makes it any easier. A man wins great battles by seizing the right moment and using it—the explanation is simple. One must be great in order to know the moment, that's

all. But women don't see that it is only small men who exaggerate the difficulties of their work. Great men find their work easy and say so, and, therefore, you'll find that women underrate great men and overpraise small ones. Clemencia really thought I ought to learn the *espada's* work from Juan. Ah! women are strange creatures. . . . Well, after that Sunday she was always bothering me to do the *capa* trick with every bull.

"'If you don't,' she used to say, 'you won't get the chance of being an *espada*.' And when she saw I laughed and paid no attention to her talk, she became more and more obstinate.

"'If the people get to know you can only do it with some bulls, they won't think much of you. Do it with every bull, then they can't say anything.'

"And I said 'No! and I shouldn't be able to say anything either.'

"'If you love me you will do as I say!'

"And when I didn't do as she wished,—it was madness—she grew cold to me, and sneered at me, and then urged me again, till I half yielded. Really, by that time I hardly knew what I couldn't do, for each day I seemed to get greater power over the bulls. At length a Sunday came, the first, I think in June, or the last in May. Clemencia sat with her mother and cousin in the best *palco;* I had got it from the Director, who now refused me nothing. I had done my *capa* trick with three bulls, one after the other, then the fourth came in. As soon as I saw him, I knew he was bad, cunning I mean, and with black rage

in the heart of him. The other men stood aside to let me do the trick, but I wouldn't. I ran away like the rest, and let him toss the *capa*. The people liked me, and so they cheered just the same, thinking I was tired; but suddenly Clemencia called out: 'The *capa* round the shoulders; the *capa* trick!' and I looked up at her; and she leaned over the front of the *palco*, and called out the words again.

"Then rage came into me, rage at her folly and cold heart; I took off my cap to her, and turned and challenged the bull with the *capa*, and, as he put down his head and rushed, I threw the *capa* round me and stood still. I did not even look at him. I knew it was no use. He struck me here on the thigh, and I went up into the air. The shock took away my senses. As I came to myself they were carrying me out of the ring, and the people were all standing up; but, as I looked towards the *palco*, I saw she wasn't standing up: she had a handkerchief before her face. At first I thought she was crying, and I felt well, and longed to say to her, 'It doesn't matter, I'm content;' then she put down the handkerchief and I saw she wasn't crying; there wasn't a tear in her eyes. She seemed surprised merely and shocked. I suppose she thought I could work miracles, or rather she didn't care much whether I was hurt or not. That turned me faint again. I came to myself in my bed, where I spent the next month. The doctor told the Duke of Medina Celi—he had come to see me the same afternoon—that the shock hadn't injured me, but I should be lame al-

ways, as the bull's horn had torn the muscles of my thigh from the bone. 'How he didn't bleed to death,' he said, 'is a wonder; now he'll pull through, but no more play with the bulls for him.' I knew better than the doctor, but I said nothing to him, only to the Duke I said:

"'Señor, a promise is a promise; I shall use the *espada* in your show in July.'

"And he said, 'Yes, my poor boy, if you wish it, and are able to; but how came you to make such a mistake?'

"'I made no mistake, Señor.'

"'You knew you'd be struck?'

"I nodded. He looked at me for a moment, and then held out his hand. He understood everything I'm sure; but he said nothing to me then.

"Juan came to see me in the evening, and next day Clemencia and her mother. Clemencia was sorry, that I could see, and wanted me to forgive her. As if I had anything to forgive when she stood there so lithe and straight, with her flower-like face and the appealing eyes. Then came days of pain while the doctors forced the muscles back into their places. Soon I was able to get up, with a crutch, and limp about. As I grew better, Clemencia came seldomer, and when she came, her mother never left the room. I knew what that meant. She had told her mother not to go away; for, though the mother thought no one good enough for her daughter, yet she pitied me, and would have left us alone—sometimes. She had a woman's heart. But no, not once. Then I set myself to get well soon. I would show them all,

I said to myself, that a lame Montes was worth more than other men. And I got better, so the doctor said, with surprising speed. . . . One day, towards the end of June, I said to the servant of the Duke—he sent a servant every day to me with fruit and flowers—that I wished greatly to see his master. And the Duke came to see me, the very same day.

"I thanked him first for all his kindness to me, and then asked:

"'Señor, have you put my name on the bills as *espada?*'

"'No,' he replied; 'you must get well first, and, indeed, if I were in your place, I should not try anything more till next season.'

"And I said, 'Señor Duque, it presses. Believe me, weak as I am, I can use the sword.'

"And he answered my very thought: 'Ah! She thinks you can't. And you want to prove the contrary. I shouldn't take the trouble, if I were you; but there! Don't deceive yourself or me; there is time yet for three or four days: I'll come again to see you, and if you wish to have your chance you shall. I give you my word.' As he left the room I had tears in my eyes; but I was glad, too, and confident: I'd teach the false friends a lesson. Save Antonio, the blacksmith, and some strangers, and the Duke's servant, no one had come near me for more than a week. Three days afterwards I wrote to the Duke asking him to fulfil his promise, and the very next day Juan, Clemencia, and her mother all came to see me together. They all wanted to know what it meant.

My name as *espada* for the next Sunday, they said, was first on the bills placarded all over Madrid, and the Duke had put underneath it—'By special request of H.M. the Queen.' I said nothing but that I was going to work; and I noticed that Clemencia wouldn't meet my eyes.

"What a day that was! That Sunday I mean. The Queen was in her box with the Duke beside her as our procession saluted them, and the great ring was crowded tier on tier, and she was in the best box I could get. But I tried not to think about her. My heart seemed to be frozen. Still I know now that I worked for her even then. When the first bull came in and the *capa* men played him, the people began to shout for me—'El Pequeño! El Pequeño! El Pequeño!'—and wouldn't let the games go on. So I limped forward in my *espada's* dress and took a *capa* from a man and challenged the bull, and he rushed at me—the honest one; I caught his look and knew it was all right, so I threw the *capa* round me and turned my back upon him. In one flash I saw the people rise in their places, and the Duke lean over the front of the *palco;* then, as the bull hesitated and stopped, and they began to cheer, I handed back the *capa*, and, after bowing, went again among the *espadas*. Then the people christened me afresh—'El Cojo!' (The Cripple!) —and I had to come forward and bow again and again, and the Queen threw me a gold cigarette case. I have it still. There it is. . . . I never looked up at Clemencia, though I could see her always. She threw no rose to me that day. . . .

Then the time came when I should kill the bull. I took the *muleta* in my left hand and went towards him with the sword uncovered in my right. I needed no trick. I held him with my will, and he looked up at me. 'Poor brute,' I thought, 'you are happier than I am.' And he bowed his head with the great, wondering, kindly eyes, and I struck straight through to the heart. On his knees he fell at my feet, and rolled over dead, almost without a quiver. As I hid my sword in the *muleta* and turned away, the people found their voices, 'Well done, The Cripple! Well done!' When I left the ring that day I left it as the first *espada* in Spain. So the Duke said, and he knew —none better. After one more Sunday the sports were over for the year, but that second Sunday I did better than the first, and I was engaged for the next season as first *espada*, with fifty thousand *duros* salary. Forty thousand I invested as the Duke advised—I have lived on the interest ever since—the other ten thousand I kept by me.

* * * * *

"I had resolved never to go near Clemencia again, and I kept my resolve for weeks. One day Juan came and told me Clemencia was suffering because of my absence. He said:

"'She's proud, you know, proud as the devil, and she won't come and see you or send to you, but she loves you. There's no doubt of that: she loves you. I know them, and I never saw a girl so gone on a man. Besides they're poor now, she and her mother; they've eaten up nearly all they had, and you're rich and could help them.'

"That made me think. I felt sure she didn't love me. That was plain enough. She hadn't even a good heart, or she would have come and cheered me up when I lay wounded—because of her obstinate folly. No! It wasn't worth while suffering any more on her account. That was clear. But if she needed me, if she were really poor? Oh, that I couldn't stand. I'd go to her. 'Are you sure?' I asked Juan, and when he said he was, I said:

"'Then I'll visit them to-morrow.'

"And on the next day I went. Clemencia received me as usual: she was too proud to notice my long absence, but the mother wanted to know why I had kept away from them so long. From that time on the mother seemed to like me greatly. I told her I was still sore—which was the truth—and I had had much to do.

"'Some lady fallen in love with you, I suppose,' said Clemencia half scoffingly—so that I could hardly believe she had wanted to see me.

"'No,' I answered, looking at her, 'one doesn't get love without seeking for it, sometimes not even then—when one's small and lame as I am.'

"Gradually the old relations established themselves again. But I had grown wiser, and watched her now with keen eyes as I had never done formerly. I found she had changed—in some subtle way had become different. She seemed kinder to me, but at the same time her character appeared to be even stronger than it had been. I remember noticing one peculiarity in her I had not remarked before. Her admiration of the physique of men

was now keen and outspoken. When we went to the theatre (as we often did) I saw that the better-looking and more finely-formed actors had a great attraction for her. I had never noticed this in her before. In fact she had seemed to me to know nothing about virile beauty, beyond a girl's vague liking for men who were tall and strong. But now she looked at men critically. She had changed; that was certain. What was the cause? . . . I could not divine. Poor fool that I was! I didn't know then that good women seldom or never care much for mere bodily qualities in a man; the women who do are generally worthless. Now, too, she spoke well of the men of Southern Spain; when I first met her she professed to admire the women of the South, but to think little of the men. Now she admired the men, too; they were warmer-hearted, she said; had more love and passion in them, and were gentler with women than those of the North. Somehow I hoped that she referred to me, that her heart was beginning to plead for me, and I was very glad and proud, though it all seemed too good to be true.

"One day in October, when I called with Juan, we found them packing their things. They had to leave, they said, and take cheaper lodgings. Juan looked at me, and some way or other I got him to take Clemencia into another room. Then I spoke to the mother: Clemencia, I hoped, would soon be my wife; in any case I couldn't allow her to want for anything; I would bring a thousand *duros* the next day, and they must not think of leaving their comfortable apartments. The mother

cried and said, I was good: 'God makes few such men,' and so forth. The next day I gave her the money, and it was arranged between us without saying anything to Clemencia. I remember about this time, in the early winter of that year, I began to see her faults more clearly, and I noticed that she had altered in many ways. Her temper had changed. It used to be equable though passionate. It had become uncertain and irritable. She had changed greatly. For now, she would let me kiss her without remonstrance, and sometimes almost as if she didn't notice the kiss, whereas before it used always to be a matter of importance. And when I asked her when she would marry me she would answer half-carelessly, 'Some time, I suppose,' as she used to do, but her manner was quite different. She even sighed once as she spoke. Certainly she had changed. What was the cause? I couldn't make it out, therefore I watched, not suspiciously, but she had grown a little strange to me—a sort of puzzle, since she had been so unkind when I lay wounded. And partly from this feeling, partly from my great love for her, I noticed everything. Still I urged her to marry me. I thought as soon as we were married, and she had a child to take care of and to love, it would be all right with both of us. Fool that I was!

"In April, which was fine, I remember, that year in Madrid—you know how cold it is away up there, and how keen the wind is; as the Madrileños say, 'twon't blow out a candle, but it'll kill a man' —Clemencia began to grow pale and nervous. I couldn't make her out; and so, more than ever,

pity strengthening love in me, I urged her to tell me when she would marry me; and one day she turned to me, and I saw she was quite white as she said:

"'After the season, perhaps.'

"Then I was happy, and ceased to press her. Early in May the games began—my golden time. I had grown quite strong again, and was surer of myself than ever. Besides, I wanted to do something to deserve my great happiness. Therefore, on one of the first days when the Queen and the Duke and Clemencia were looking on, I killed the bull with the sword immediately after he entered the ring, and before he had been tired at all. From that day on the people seemed crazy about me. I couldn't walk in the streets without being cheered; a crowd followed me wherever I went; great nobles asked me to their houses, and their ladies made much of me. But I didn't care, for all the time Clemencia was kind, and so I was happy.

"One day suddenly she asked me why I didn't make Juan an *espada.* I told her I had offered him the first place in my *cuadrilla;* but he wouldn't accept it. She declared that it was natural of him to refuse when I had passed him in the race; but why didn't I go to the Duke and get him made an *espada?* I replied laughingly that the Duke didn't make men *espadas,* but God or their parents. Then her brows drew down, and she said she hadn't thought to find such mean jealousy in me. So I answered her seriously that I didn't believe Juan would succeed as an *espada,* or else I should do

what I could to get him appointed. At once she came and put her arms on my shoulders, and said 'twas like me, and she would tell Juan; and after that I could do nothing but kiss her. A little later I asked Juan about it, and he told me he thought he could do the work at least as well as Girvalda, and if I got him the place, he would never forget my kindness. So I went to the Director and told him what I wished. At first he refused, saying Juan had no talent, he would only get killed. When I pressed him he said all the *espadas* were engaged, and made other such excuses. So at last I said I'd work no more unless he gave Juan a chance. Then he yielded after grumbling a great deal.

"Two Sundays later Juan entered the ring for the first time as an *espada*. He looked the part to perfection. Never was there a more splendid figure of a man, and he was radiant in silver and blue. His mother was in the box that day with Clemencia and her mother. Just before we all parted as the sports were about to begin, Clemencia drew me on one side, and said, 'You'll see that he succeeds, won't you?' And I replied, 'Yes, of course, I will. Trust me; it'll be all right.' And it was, though I don't think it would have been, if she hadn't spoken. I remembered my promise to her, and when I saw that the bull which Juan ought to kill was vicious, I told another *espada* to kill him, and so got Juan an easy bull, which I took care to have tired out before I told him the moment had come. Juan wasn't a coward—no! but he hadn't the peculiar nerve needed for

the business. The *matador's* spirit should rise to the danger, and Juan's didn't rise. He was white, but determined to do his best. That I could see. So I said to him, 'Go on, man! Don't lose time, or he'll get his wind again. You're all right; I shall be near you as one of your *cuadrilla*.' And so I was, and if I hadn't been, Juan would have come to grief. Yes, he'd have come to grief that very first day.

"Naturally enough we spent the evening together. It was a real *tertulia*, Señora Alvareda said; but Clemencia sat silent with the great, dark eyes turned in upon her thoughts, and the niece and myself were nearly as quiet, while Juan talked for every one, not forgetting himself. As he had been depressed before the trial so now he was unduly exultant, forgetting altogether, as it seemed to me, not only his nervousness but also that it had taken him two strokes to kill the bull. His first attempt was a failure, and the second one, though it brought the bull to his knees, never reached his heart. But Juan was delighted and seemed never to weary of describing the bull and how he had struck him, his mother listening to him the while adoringly. It was past midnight when we parted from our friends; and Juan, as we returned to my rooms, would talk of nothing but the salary he expected to get. I was out of sorts; he had bragged so incessantly I had scarcely got a word with Clemencia, who could hardly find time to tell me she had a bad headache. Juan would come up with me; he wanted to know whether I'd go on the morrow to the Director to get him a

permanent engagement. I got rid of him, at last, by saying I was tired to death, and it would look better to let the Director come and ask for his services. So at length we parted. After he left me I sat for some time wondering at Clemencia's paleness. She was growing thin too! And what thoughts had induced that rapt expression of face?

"Next morning I awoke late and had so much to do that I resolved to put off my visit to Clemencia till the afternoon, but in the meantime the Director spoke to me of Juan as rather a bungler, and when I defended him, agreed at last to engage him for the next four Sundays. This was a better result than I had expected, so as soon as I was free I made off to tell Juan the good news. I met his mother at the street door where she was talking with some women; she followed me into the *patio* saying Juan was not at home.

"'Never mind,' I replied carelessly, 'I have good news for him, so I'll go upstairs to his room and wait.'

"'Oh!' she said, 'you can't do that; you mustn't; Juan wouldn't like it.'

"Then I laughed outright. Juan wouldn't like it—oh no! It was amusing to say that when we had lived together like brothers for years, and had had no secrets from one another. But she persisted and grew strangely hot and excited. Then I thought to myself—there you are again; these women understand nothing. So I went away, telling her to send Juan to me as soon as he came in.

At this she seemed hugely relieved and became voluble in excuses. In fact her manner altered so entirely that before I had gone fifty yards down the street, it forced me to wonder. Suddenly my wonder changed to suspicion. Juan wasn't out! Who was with him I mustn't see?

"As I stopped involuntarily, I saw a man on the other side of the street who bowed to me. I went across and said:

"'Friend, I am Montes, the matador. Do you own this house?'

"He answered that he did, and that every one in Madrid knew me.

"So I said, 'Lend me a room on your first-floor for an hour; *cosa de mujer;* (A lady's in the case.) you understand.'

"At once he led me up-stairs and showed me a room from the windows of which I could see the entrance to Juan's lodging. I thanked him, and when he left me I stood near the window and smoked and thought. What could it all mean? . . . Had Clemencia anything to do with Juan? She made me get him his trial as *espada;* charged me to take care of him. He was from the South, too, and she had grown to like Southern men: 'they were passionate and gentle with women.' Curses on her! Her paleness occurred to me, her fits of abstraction. As I thought, every memory fitted into its place, and what had been mysterious grew plain to me; but I wouldn't accept the evidence of reason. No! I'd wait and see. Then I'd—at once I grew quiet. But again the thoughts came—like the flies that plague the

cattle in summer time—and again I brushed them aside, and again they returned.

"Suddenly I saw Juan's mother come into the street wearing altogether too careless an expression. She looked about at haphazard as if she expected someone. After a moment or two of this she slipped back into the *patio* with mystery in her sudden decision and haste. Then out came a form I knew well, and, with stately, even step, looking neither to the right hand nor the left, walked down the street. It was Clemencia, as my heart had told me it would be. I should have known her anywhere even had she not—just below the window where I was watching—put back her *mantilla* with a certain proud grace of movement which I had admired a hundred times. As she moved her head to feel that the *mantilla* draped her properly I saw her face; it was drawn and set like one fighting against pain. That made me smile with pleasure.

"Five minutes later Juan swung out of the doorway in the full costume of an *espada*—he seemed to sleep in it now—with a cigarette between his teeth. Then I grew sad and pitiful. We had been such friends. I had meant only good to him always. And he was such a fool! I understood it all now; knew, as if I had been told, that the intimacy between them dated from the time when I lay suffering in bed. Thinking me useless and never having had any real affection for me, Clemencia had then followed her inclination and tried to win Juan. She had succeeded easily enough, no doubt, but not in getting him to marry her.

Later, she induced me to make Juan an *espada*, hoping against hope that he'd marry her when his new position had made him rich. On the other hand he had set himself to cheat me because of the money I had given her mother, which relieved him from the necessity of helping them, and secondly, because it was only through my influence that he could hope to become an *espada*. Ignoble beasts! And then jealousy seized me as I thought of her admiration of handsome men, and at once I saw her in his arms. Forthwith pity, and sadness, and anger left me, and, as I thought of him swaggering past the window, I laughed aloud. Poor weak fools! I, too, could cheat.

"He had passed out of the street. I went downstairs and thanked the landlord for his kindness to me. 'For your good-nature,' I said, 'you must come and see me work from a box next Sunday. Ask for me, I won't forget.' And he thanked me with many words and said he had never missed a Sunday since he had first seen me play with the *capa* three years before. I laughed and nodded to him and went my way homewards, whither I knew Juan had gone before me.

"As I entered my room, he rose to meet me with a shadow as of doubt or fear upon him. But I laughed cheerfully, gaily enough to deceive even so finished an actor as he was, and told him the good news. 'Engaged,' I cried, slapping him on the shoulder. 'The Director engages you for four Sundays certain.' And that word 'certain' made me laugh louder still—jubilantly. Then afraid of overdoing my part, I sat quietly for

some time and listened to his expressions of fatuous self-satisfaction. As he left me to go and trumpet the news from *café* to *café*, I had to choke down my contempt for him by recalling that picture, by forcing myself to see them in each other's arms. Then I grew quiet again and went to call upon my betrothed.

" She was at home and received me as usual, but with more kindness than was her wont. ' She feels a little remorse at deceiving me,' I said to myself, reading her now as if her soul were an open book. I told her of Juan's engagement and she let slip ' I wish I had known that sooner ! ' But I did not appear to notice anything. It amused me now to see how shallow she was and how blind I had been. And then I played with her as she had often, doubtless, played with me. ' He will go far, will Juan,' I said, ' now that he has begun—very far, in a short time.' And within me I laughed at the double meaning as she turned startled eyes upon me. And then, ' His old loves will mourn for the distance which must soon separate him from them. Oh, yes, Juan will go far and leave them behind.' I saw a shade come upon her face, and, therefore, added: ' But no one will grudge him his success. He's so good-looking and good-tempered, and kind and true.' And then she burst into tears, and I went to her and asked as if suspiciously, ' Why, what's the matter? Clemencia ! ' Amid her sobs, she told me she didn't know, but she felt upset, out of sorts, nervous: she had a headache. ' Heartache,' I laughed to myself, and bade her go and lie down; rest would do her good; I'd come again

on the morrow. As I turned to leave the room she called me back and put her arms round my neck and asked me to be patient with her; she was foolish, but she'd make it up to me yet. . . . And I comforted her, the poor, shallow fool, and went away.

"In some such fashion as this the days passed; each hour—now my eyes were opened—bringing me some fresh entertainment; for, in spite of their acting, I saw that none of them were happy. I knew everything. I guessed that Juan, loving his liberty, was advising Clemencia to make up to me, and I saw how badly she played her part. And all this had escaped me a few days before; I laughed at myself more contemptuously than at them. It interested me, too, to see that Liberata had grown suspicious. She no longer trusted Juan's protestations implicitly. Every now and then, with feminine bitterness, she thrust the knife of her own doubt and fear into Clemencia's wound. 'Don't you think, Montes, Clemencia is getting pale and thin?' she'd ask; 'it is for love of you, you know. She should marry soon.' And all the while she cursed me in her heart for a fool, while I laughed to myself. The comedy was infinitely amusing to me, for now I held the cords in my hand, and knew I could drop the curtain and cut short the acting just when I liked. Clemencia's mother, too, would sometimes set to work to amuse me as she went about with eyes troubled, as if anxious for the future, and yet stomach-satisfied with the comforts of the present. She, too, thought it worth while, now and then, to befool

me, when fear came upon her—between meals. That did not please me! When she tried to play with me, the inconceivable stupidity of my former blind trust became a torture to me. Juan's mother I saw but little of; yet I liked her. She was honest at least, and deceit was difficult to her. Juan was her idol; all he did was right in her eyes; it was not her fault that she couldn't see he was like a poisoned well. All these days Juan was friendly to me as usual, with scarcely a shade of the old condescension in his manner. He no longer showed envy by remarking upon my luck. Since he himself had been tested, he seemed to give me as much respect as his self-love could spare. Nor did he now boast, as he used to do, of his height and strength. Once, however, on the Friday evening, I think it was, he congratulated Clemencia on my love for her, and joked about our marriage. The time had come to drop the curtain and make an end.

"On the Saturday I went to the ring and ordered my *palco* to be filled with flowers. From there I went to the Duke of Medina Celi. He received me as always, with kindness, thought I looked ill, and asked me whether I felt the old wound still. 'No,' I replied, 'no, *Señor Duque*, and if I come to you now it is only to thank you once more for all your goodness to me.'

"And he said after a pause—I remember each word; for he meant well:

"'Montes, there's something very wrong.' And then, 'Montes, one should never adore a woman; they all want a master. My hairs have grown

grey in learning that. . . . A woman, you see, may look well and yet be cold-hearted and—not good. But a man would be a fool to refuse nuts because one that looked all right was hollow.'

"'You are wise,' I said, '*Señor Duque!* and I have been foolish. I hope it may be well with you always; but wisdom and folly come to the same end at last.'

"After I left him I went to Antonio and thanked him, and gave him a letter to be opened in a week. There were three enclosures in it—one for himself, one for the mother of Juan, and one for the mother of Clemencia, and each held three thousand *duros*. As they had cheated me for money, money they should have—with my contempt. Then I went back to the ring, and as I looked up to my *palco* and saw that the front of it was one bed of white and scarlet blossoms, I smiled. 'White for purity,' I said, 'and scarlet for blood, a fit show!' And I went home and slept like a child.

"Next day in the ring I killed two bulls, one on his first rush, and the other after the usual play. Then another *espada* worked, and then came the turn of Juan. As the bull stood panting I looked up at the *palco*. There they all were, Clemencia with hands clasped on the flowers and fixed, dilated eyes, her mother half asleep behind her. Next to Clemencia, the niece with flushed cheeks, and leaning on her shoulder his mother. Juan was much more nervous than he had been on the previous Sunday. As his bull came into the ring he asked me hurriedly: 'Do you think

it's an easy one?' I told him carelessly that all bulls were easy and he seemed to grow more and more nervous. When the bull was ready for him he turned to me, passing his tongue feverishly over his dry lips.

"'You'll stand by me, won't you, Montes?'

"And I asked with a smile:

"'Shall I stand by you as you've stood by me?'

"'Yes, of course, we've always been friends.'

"'I shall be as true to you as you have been to me!' I said. And I moved to his right hand and looked at the bull. It was a good one; I couldn't have picked a better. In his eyes I saw courage that would never yield and hate that would strike in the death-throe, and I exulted and held his eyes with mine, and promised him revenge. While he bowed his horns to the *muleta,* he still looked at me and I at him; and as I felt that Juan had levelled his sword, and was on the point of striking, I raised my head with a sweep to the side, as if I had been the bull; and as I swung, so the brave bull swung too. And then—then all the ring swam round with me, and yet I had heard the shouting and seen the spectators spring to their feet. . . .

"I was in the street close to the Alvaredas'. The mother met me at the door; she was crying and the tears were running down her fat, greasy cheeks. She told me Clemencia had fainted and had been carried home, and Juan was dead—ripped open—and his mother distracted, and 'twas a pity, for he was so handsome and kind and good-

natured, and her best dress was ruined, and *los toros* shouldn't be allowed, and—as I brushed past her in disgust—that Clemencia was in her room crying.

"I went up-stairs and entered the room. There she sat with her elbows on the table and her hair all round her face and down her back, and her fixed eyes stared at me. As I closed the door and folded my arms and looked at her, she rose, and her stare grew wild with surprise and horror, and then, almost without moving her lips, she said:

"'Holy Virgin! You did it! I see it in your face!'

"And my heart jumped against my arms for joy, and I said in the same slow whisper, imitating her:

"'Yes; I did it.'

"As I spoke she sprang forward with hate in her face, and poured out a stream of loathing and contempt on me. She vomited abuse as from her very soul: I was low and base and cowardly; I was —God knows what all. And he was handsome and kind, with a face like a king. . . . And I had thought she could love me, me, the ugly, little, lame cur while he was there. And she laughed. She'd never have let my lips touch her if it hadn't been that her mother liked me and to please him. And now I had killed him, the best friend I had. Oh, 'twas horrible! Then she struck her head with her fists and asked how God, God, God could allow me to kill a man whose finger was worth a thousand lives such as mine!

"Then I laughed and said:

"'You mistake. You killed him. You made him an *espada*—you!'

"As I spoke her eyes grew fixed and her mouth opened, and she seemed to struggle to speak, but she only groaned—and fell face forwards on the floor.

"I turned and left the room as her mother entered it." After a long pause Montes went on:

"I heard afterwards that she died next morning in premature child-birth. I left Madrid that night and came here, where I have lived ever since, if this can be called living. . . . Yet at times now fairly content, save for one thing—'Remorse?' Yes!"—And the old man rose to his feet, while his great eyes blazing with passion held me—"Remorse! That I let the bull kill him.

"I should have torn his throat out with my own hands."

FIRST LOVE (A CONFESSION)

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MY boyhood and youth were passed in Brighton. I entered the College there as a boy of ten, and went through every class on the Modern side in the usual seven years. I only tell this to show that from the beginning my father intended me to go into business, and that I was not particularly clever at books. I loved football as much as I hated French, and I learned more of "fives" in half an hour than I knew of German after eight years' teaching. In fact, if it had not been for mathematics I should not have got my "remove" each year regularly as I managed to do. There were lots of fellows who could beat my head off at learning; but there were very few as strong or as good at games, and I'd have been Captain of the School if Wilson, who was one of the best "bats" of his day (he played afterwards for the "Gentlemen"), had not been a contemporary of mine. I was not bad-looking either. I do not mean I was handsome or anything of that sort; but I was tall and dark, and my features were fairly regular, and, as I had more of a moustache than almost any fellow in the school, I rather fancied myself.

After leaving Brighton College, my father got me a clerkship with Lawrence, Loewenthal and Co., stockbrokers, of Copthall Court. My father was rector of a Brighton parish, and knew Mr.

Lawrence who came regularly to his church. The two old boys were great "pals," because, as my father said, they were both Protestants and not Catholics in disguise; but I always thought that my father's liking for Mr. Lawrence's port and Mr. Lawrence's respect for my father's birth and learning had more to do with their mutual esteem. However that may be, old Lawrence gave me a good start and I turned it to account. From the first I took to business. The school work at Latin and Greek had had no meaning for me; but in the City the tangible results of energy and skill were always before me, interesting me in spite of myself, and exciting me to do my best. And rivalry soon came to lend another spur. In Throgmorton Street my chief competitors were young German Jews, keen as mustard in everything relating to business, and preternaturally sharp in scenting personal profit. Their acuteness and boldness fascinated me: I went about with them a good deal, picked up conversational German without much effort, and soon learned from my mentors how fortunes were to be made. A little group of us pooled our savings, and began to speculate and, after a succession of gains and losses which about balanced themselves, turned our tens into hundreds over a "slump" in American rails. Our success was due to Waldstein—the Julius Waldstein who has since made a great fortune, and whom I should like to write about some day or other, as I look upon him as the first financial genius of the age. But now I must get on with my story. It was a remark I made after this lucky "deal" that drew

Mr. Lawrence's attention to me and gave me my first step up in the house. I had gone into his private room with some transfers to be signed. He was reading a letter; in the middle of it he rang for the managing clerk, and asked him:

"How are Louisvilles going?"

"I'll see," was the reply; and in a minute or two old Simkins returned with:

"Steady at 48."

I could not help muttering "They'll be steadier at 35."

"What do you know about it?" asked Lawrence, with an air of amused surprise. His tone put me on my mettle, and I laid my reasons, or rather Waldstein's, before him, and he soon saw that I knew what I was talking about. A year afterwards, I, too, was a managing clerk and a member of the Stock Exchange; and from that time on have never found it very difficult to lay by something each year. It's curious, too, how the habit of saving grows on one—but I am forgetting my story.

As I became interested in my work and confident of success I wanted some one to talk to, to brag to if the truth must be told, and life, I have noticed, generally furnishes us with the opportunity of gratifying our desires. I still kept up the custom of going home to Brighton from Saturday till Monday. And one Sunday coming out of church my sister introduced me to some people whom I took to immediately, Mrs. and Miss Longden. Mabel Longden was tall and good-looking, but too dark for my taste. Still, we chummed at

once, and perhaps got along together better than if we had fallen in love at first sight—a thing, by the way, which I have never believed in. Mrs. Longden was the widow of a major in the army, and lived in a small house in Kemp Town. She had only a hundred a year or so beyond her pension, and her one ambition in life was to keep herself and her two daughters like ladies. Her love of gentility was so passionate that when the rumour got about that she was the daughter of a small tradesman, everyone believed it. Mabel had a sister whom I have not mentioned yet, perhaps because I saw little of her for some time, and the little I saw did not interest me. She could not have been more than thirteen or fourteen years of age when I first met her, and she seemed to me an ordinary schoolgirl—all ribs and ankles. Her face was not even pretty; the eyes were all right, greyish and large, but the nose was inclined to be thick and the oval of the face was too narrow; the jaws seemed pinched in, and this peculiarity gave her an uncomfortably sharp look. She was a strange child in every way, and I did not like her. I remember the first time I really noticed her. I had been talking to Mabel about business; telling her how I had nabbed a fellow who had tried to cheat me, when suddenly I looked up and found Blanche gazing at me. As our eyes met she looked away quietly, and then got up and went out of the room, leaving me under the impression that she disapproved of me, or did not like what I had been saying. I put this down to "cheek" that deserved to be snubbed; but she never gave me the

opportunity of snubbing her; she seemed rather to avoid me.

A few weeks later I was waiting one afternoon in the little parlour. Mabel had gone up to dress to go out with me, when suddenly Blanche came into the room with her cheeks aglow, crying, "Where's mother?" She had been skating, and her sparkling eyes and rich colour so improved her that I exclaimed, "Why, Blanche, you're quite pretty!" I suppose the astonishment in my voice was rather marked; for as I looked her eyes grew indignant; the colour in her cheeks flamed from pink to scarlet, and she turned and stalked out of the room with her chin in the air. An absurd child; she annoyed without interesting me, and I resolved to take no further notice of her.

It was easy to keep that resolution; for about this time my companionship with Mabel became close: we began to spoon in fact, and soon tried to believe ourselves very much in love with each other. But there was always something lacking in our intimacy, and now, looking back, I see that there was no real bond between us, and I begin to suspect that kisses often stand youth in lieu of sympathy. For even if I would, I really could not tell much of my flirtation with Mabel Longden. She was good to look at and good to be with, too uniformly sweet-tempered ever to have cared much about me, I imagine; but I know little of her true character and temperament; for love was not in her, love with its terrible need of self-betrayal. There were moments, it is true, when we seemed drawn together, moments when her eyes sought

mine with timid abandonment, and when pride in her looks and pity of her weakness grew in me to unselfish tenderness; but there was no enduring strength in the feeling, no roots of life in it, and a few days' separation chilled us both. I am glad now to think that the play was pure comedy on both sides, though at the time I was often vaguely disappointed with our aloofness from one another, and tried by dwelling on her beauty to bring myself to the passionate ardour I ought to have felt for her. Mabel never really loved me at all; at the height of our intimacy I noticed that she used to lead me on to talk of the fortune I should make, and of the great house we should have and the horses and carriages, and it seems to me now, though I am half ashamed to say it, that it was some picture in her mind of dress and jewelry and distinction which made her try to like me. In any case the matter is not worth thinking about any longer, and I only mention it now because it belongs to my story.

I had known Mabel Longden for nearly two years, and for six or eight months had spent three-fourths of the time I passed in Brighton, with her, when I called early one Saturday evening and found that she was out. I was a little hurt—more in vanity than in affection, I think—and disappointed, which I took to be a proof of feeling, whereas it was merely the result of balked habit. True, I was later than usual, much later in fact; but then my father had kept me talking of my younger brother Tom, and I had bought tickets for the opera to make up for my late coming. I

found it difficult to disguise my bad humour when I was told that Mabel had gone out for the evening and would probably not be home till eleven.

"You see," said Mrs. Longden apologetically, "you never sent her word, and I presume she thought you were not coming at all." While she was speaking, my eyes, wandering about in hesitation and annoyance, suddenly caught sight of an expression of indignant contempt on Blanche's face as she sat looking into the fire.

"But what am I to do with these tickets?" I asked, in helpless irritation. As I spoke Blanche kicked the fender and got up hastily, and an idea came into my head.

"Would you let me take Blanche?" and I turned to Mrs. Longden.

"Yes," said Mrs. Longden after a moment's hesitation, only to be noticed because of her unvarying suavity; "yes, certainly; and I think Blanche would enjoy it. She loves music."

"Well, Blanche?" I asked; but there was no need of an answer, for the girl's eyes were dancing.

"Oh," she said in a low voice, as if to excuse her joy, "it is 'Le Nozze di Figaro' isn't it? and I love music, and Titiens and Trebelli are both in it. Oh," and she drew in her breath with delight and clasped her hands, "it *is* kind of you!"

"What will you wear, dear?" asked her mother, and the girl's face fell so lugubriously that I could not help laughing. "Anything will do: we must start at once," I said, and bustled them both upstairs. I like music as much as most people, but I like, too, to talk between the acts, and my com-

panion that night was more than silent; still Titiens was very good in spite of her bulk, and Trebelli the most enchanting page that was ever seen. When she sang "Voi che sapete" with that angelic voice of hers, I was carried off my feet.

As she finished the song my companion gave a queer, little, hysterical squeak that turned all eyes upon her. I saw that the child was overwrought; her face was pale and pinched, and the eyes blazing, so I whispered, "Let us go, Blanche, eh?"

"Oh, no!" she said. "No! it is too beautiful —please, please don't go."

"If we stay," I insisted, "you mustn't cry out; the people are all looking at you."

"What do the people matter?" she snapped, and then, pleadingly, "please, let me listen." Of course there was nothing more to be said, and we stayed to the end.

It was a fine night, and we walked home together, Blanche taking my arm.

"Are you glad I took you?" I asked, feeling that I should like her to thank me; she pressed my arm. But I wanted to talk, so I went on:

"You liked the play, didn't you?" That started her off; she was so excited with enthusiasm and admiration that she talked like one out of breath.

"The music," she said, "was divine; so beautiful, it hurt. I ache with it still. I can never, never forget it."

I laughed at her exaggerations, and brought her down to common sense, and then she began to attack the play.

"It was beastly," if you please; "all falsehood and deceit and cheating. I hope life isn't like that," she burst out, "if it is, I shall hate it. How could Mozart have given that lovely music to those horrid words and horrid people? How could he?"

There seemed to be some sense in what she said, but as I knew very little about it, I preferred to change the subject. And then the conversation died away.

When we reached her house I left her at the door. Somehow or other I did not feel inclined to go in and make up my little difference with Mabel. It seems to me now as if our estrangement began that evening; but, indeed, I did not trouble much about it, either then or later. And it was not any affection for Blanche that put Mabel out of my head: no, the child excited my curiosity, and that was all; she was evidently clever, and I liked that; but she was also intensely emotional, which seemed odd rather than pleasant to me.

For some weeks I did not call at the Longdens, and when I called I noticed that Mabel was affected in manner and speech. Her coldness I didn't mind; in fact, I felt relieved by it; but her graceful poses and little slang phrases of gentility seemed ridiculous to me. I wondered that I had never been disagreeably impressed by them before. I felt, too, that they were characteristic of her; she was affected and vain. I did not want to be alone with her, and though we spent several afternoons together I maintained my attitude of polite carelessness. Mabel scarcely seemed to notice my change of manner; she was often out when I

called, and I fell upon the idea of asking Blanche to accompany us whenever Mabel happened to go out with me. At first Blanche used to refuse point blank; but as I returned to the charge she consented now and then, evidently in accord with her sister; indeed, Mabel often pressed her to say "Yes."

I remember one Saturday evening taking them both to dine at Mutton's. We had a private room and the best dinner the place could afford; for success and Waldstein's example were teaching me to be extravagant in such matters. The week had been a red-letter one for me; I had cleared a thousand pounds in it and naturally was cock-a-hoop, though I did not conceal from myself, or even from the Longdens, that my success was due to Waldstein. In fact, towards the end of the dinner I set his whole plan before them and gave all his reasons for the course he took. Before I had got half through the story it was impossible not to notice that Blanche was my only listener. Mabel made polite exclamations of attention at the proper places; but she was manifestly rather bored by the account, whereas Blanche asked about everything she didn't understand, and appeared to be really engrossed by the dramatic elements in the struggle for wealth. Piqued by Mabel's manner, I did my best to interest Blanche and succeeded, I suppose, for Mabel at length left the table and took to drumming on the window pane to show her impatience.

"I must go!" she exclaimed at last. "I expect Captain Burroughs to call this evening to try

over a song with me, and I don't want to be late." After that there was nothing left for us but to put on our wraps and go. I had met Captain Burroughs at the Longdens more than once, but had not paid much attention to him. He was an ordinary-looking man, I thought, with nothing particular about him except that he was well set-up and had large blue eyes. Now as Mabel spoke his image came before me, and I understood that he was good-looking, that she thought him exceedingly attractive, and had more than consoled herself with his courtship for my inattention. Perhaps even she had begun to go her own way before I had thought of going mine. Yes, she had; a hundred little signs unnoticed at the time assured me that she had. The discovery relieved and pleased me greatly; I grew excited and felt quite cordial to her. She was a fine girl after all, and deserved a handsome husband like Burroughs. Was it this elation or the wine I had drunk that made me act as I did? I don't know; the bare facts are not flattering to me, but I'll set them down. Mabel went out of the room first, as if in a hurry to get to her Captain; she disappeared just as I took up Blanche's jacket to help her on with it. As the young girl swung round before me I noticed for the first time that she had a figure, a figure that promised to be a very pretty one, and after putting on her jacket I could not help taking her slender waist in my hands. Of course I said something to cover my action: "Go along, let us catch Mabel," or something of that sort; but the words died on my lips, for she turned

abruptly and faced me with an imperative: "Don't!"

"Go along," I repeated awkwardly, "you're only a child."

She moved away haughtily, without a word, and followed her sister downstairs.

The cab was waiting for us, and as soon as we were seated in it I forced a conversation with Mabel on the subject of her song and Captain Burroughs' voice.

After this incident Blanche avoided me persistently. At first, feeling rather uncomfortable, I was not at all sorry to get out of a complete explanation. But as the feeling of shame wore off I began to contrive occasions for being alone with her. "I don't care for her," I used to say to myself, "but I don't want her to think me a howling cad." But though I did not care for her she was in my thoughts a good deal, and knew how to pique my vanity at least by continually avoiding me. She was more successful in this than she could have been a few months before; for now I never went to the house without finding Burroughs in the little parlour on the ground floor, filling the place I had formerly occupied beside Mabel. In fact, about this time Mrs. Longden confided to me that the pair were engaged, and when I congratulated Mabel I noticed that she was prettier and less affected than I had ever imagined she could be. Love is like youth for hiding faults and setting off merits. After this event my chances of meeting Blanche alone became too slight to be worth the risk of disturbing the lovers,

and so I gave up going to the house at all regularly. Mere chance soon helped me where purpose had failed. One afternoon late, as I reached the house I found the servant at the door, who told me that every one was out except Miss Blanche. I was very glad to hear it. Blanche was in the parlour alone, and as I entered she stood up hastily, and returned my greeting with a cold "I'll see if mother or Mabel is in." But I stopped in front of the door, and said:

"Won't you speak to me, Blanche? If I've offended you, I beg your pardon. Forgive me, and let us be friends again." I caught myself speaking with an intensity far greater than I had thought of using; and, as her face did not relax and she kept her eyes obstinately bent on the ground, I began again with an extraordinary eagerness:

"Why will you bear malice? I had no idea you could be so cross. Just remember what a great talk we had that night, and forgive me." Still the same silence and little downcast face, scarcely to be seen in the gathering shadows. I began again: "Really, Blanche, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. It is childish to sulk so: yes, childish," I repeated, for she had looked up at last. "If you were older you would know that every woman forgives when the man apologizes and asks for pardon." She looked me straight in the face, but said nothing. Had I excited myself by my own pleading, or what was it? I don't know; but I began again in a different tone:

"Upon my word, if you won't speak, I'll treat

you like the little girl you are, and kiss you into a good temper."

"You daren't," she said, and stood rigidly.

"You mustn't dare me," I cried, and I threw my left arm round her waist, and held her face to mine with my right hand. At first she struggled desperately, and writhed so that I could hardly hold her. Then gradually I overcame her struggles, and kissed her again and again. I shall never be able to describe the strange, keen pleasure I took in the touch of her lips; nor the intimate, intense delight it gave me to hold her tender, panting form against my breast in the darkness. Whilst I was still embracing and kissing her, the idea came to me that her resistance had become merely formal; that she was not trying to avoid my lips. At once conscience smote me, and I felt that I had been a brute. No sort of excuse for me —none. I pulled myself together, and stopped kissing her. Then I began pleading again.

"Little Blanche, have you forgiven me? Are we friends again? Won't you speak to me now?" And I laid my cheek to hers: the girl's face was wet, and I realized with a pang that she was crying silently. This was worse than I had feared. I was genuinely grieved.

"Oh, Blanche," I exclaimed, "if you knew how sorry I am! Please don't cry; I didn't mean to hurt you; I'm so sorry—what am I to do? I'll never, never forgive myself." As I began to speak she slipped from my arms and went to the door.

"Blanche," I went on—for I couldn't let her go like that—"you must hate me to leave me so;

won't you say you'll forgive me, please?" She paused, holding the door ajar; then I heard her say in a little subdued voice,

"There's nothing to forgive," and then "It wasn't your fault," and the door closed behind her quickly, leaving me in the dark, half penitent and half in doubt as to her meaning, though the tone of her voice had partially reassured me.

After she left me I seemed to be possessed by a demon of unrest. Up and down the parade I tramped reproaching myself for what I had done. I had no business to kiss her. It was a shame. I felt very clearly that kisses meant infinitely more to her than they did to her sister. What was I to do? I didn't love her, and yet I had never kissed anyone with such passion. She was an inscrutable mystery to me. Why had she cried? Did she dislike me? Had she grown tired of struggling, or merely affected to struggle, wishing all the time to be kissed? This flattering hypothesis seemed to be true; but, if true, why had she begun to cry? And if she had cried out of vexation, why did she say that there was nothing to forgive, and that it wasn't my fault? I couldn't read the riddle; and it was too fascinating to leave unread. I wanted to return to the house to see her if but for a moment, but that went against my pride. I resolved to write to her. The girl was a mystery, and the mystery had an attraction for me that I could not account for nor explain. That night I went up to my little bedroom and sat down to write to her. I soon found that the task was exceedingly difficult. At one moment I was writ-

ing as if I loved her, and the next I was warning her that I did not love her yet. At length I began to quiet myself: "Why write at all?" But I couldn't leave her without a word, and so I decided at last to write just a brief note, saying how grieved I should be to hurt or offend her in any way, and declaring that I would call next Saturday afternoon as soon as I reached Brighton. I began "Dear little Blanche," and ended up with "I shall think of you all through the week; yours, Will Rutherford."

The week passed much as other weeks had passed, with this difference however, that from Monday on I began to look forward more and more eagerly to seeing Blanche again. I did not write this to her in the meantime, partly out of prudence, partly out of the wish to tell it to her when we met. As soon as I reached Brighton on the Saturday I hurried off to the Longdens. The mother met me in the parlour.

"Where's Blanche?" I asked, gaily.

"Blanche!" repeated Mrs. Longden, with a slight tone of surprise; "she has gone into the country to stay with some friends."

"Into the country," I muttered, in confusion; "where to?"

"Near Winchester," came the calm reply.

"But did she leave no message for me—no letter?"

"Not that I'm aware of," replied Mrs. Longden, smilingly; "I didn't even know that you took interest enough in each other to write or send messages."

And that was all. I left the house more bewildered than ever; but my pride was up in arms, and I resolved to put Blanche out of my mind completely. That seemed easy enough at first; but with time it became increasingly difficult. The mystery puzzled me more and more, and the abrupt parting piqued my curiosity. As the weeks passed and I recalled all our meetings and what she had said, I began to see that she was very intelligent and very ingenuous. At length I couldn't stand it any longer; so I wrote to her, telling her how constantly I thought of her, and begging her to let me see her. I took the letter to Mrs. Longden, who promised to forward it, with a request to Blanche to answer it, and next week Mrs. Longden showed me the end of a letter Blanche had written to her: "I received the letter you sent me; please tell him there's no answer. I have nothing to say."

I had gone as far as my pride would allow. From that day I never went near the Longdens, but gave myself up to work, and gradually the fascination of business took hold of me once again. Four or five years later I married and bought a little country place near Winchester. A year or so afterwards I took my wife to a ball given by the officers of the —— Hussars, who were quartered in the Cathedral city. I knew a good many people, and, as I liked dancing, prepared to enjoy myself; feeling sure that my wife would be well taken care of. After the second or third dance, a Captain Wolfe come up to me and said, "You're in luck, my friend; I'm going to intro-

duce you to the belle of the ball." With some laughing protestation I followed him and he presented me by simply saying "This is Mr. Rutherford."

The girl certainly deserved his praise; she was one of those bewitchingly pretty girls one sees now and then in England and nowhere else in the world. I cannot describe her except by saying that she was above the middle height and of a very perfect lissom figure, with the most dazzingly beautiful face I have ever seen.

"Pardon me," I said, "but Captain Wolfe forgot to tell me your name."

"Don't you know it?" she asked, while her blue eyes danced with amusement.

"No," I replied, "how should I? I have never seen you before."

I spoke with absolute conviction.

"What a bad compliment—to forget me and deny me! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" and she pouted adorably.

"The best of compliments," I retorted warmly; "the certainty that if I had ever seen you I could never have forgotten you."

She swept me a low courtesy, and then, with sudden gravity, "Allow me to introduce myself, Miss Blanche Longden that was, now Miss Longden."

I was dumbfounded. The grace, the charm, the self-possession, I could understand, even the fine figure: but not the change in face. Blanche's nose had been rather heavy and shapeless, and now it was daintily cut; the pointed chin was rounded,

the oval of the face had filled out, the eyes had surely grown darker, the complexion that had been muddy was now like exquisite porcelain; but even these extraordinary changes did not account for her entrancing loveliness. I was lost in wonder.

She laughed in a pleased way at my embarrassment:

"You don't recognize me even now?"

"No," I confessed ruefully. "You are altogether changed: even your voice has improved beyond recognition."

"Let us sit down," she said, "and talk, if you have this dance free;" and I sat down, careless whether I was free or not. At last I should get the mystery solved. What did we talk about? At first the usual things. Her sister, I learned, was married and had three children. She was in India now with her husband, and Mrs. Longden, in Brittany, was taking care of the little ones. At last I put my question:

"Why did you go away from Brighton, and never answer my letters?"

"I did answer them. Mother told me she showed you my answer."

"That was no answer. You have no idea how disappointed and hurt I was; how I grieved over your silence." I could not help being much more intense with this girl than I had any right to be. "But tell me why you left me so, and I'll forgive you."

She seemed to consider, and then:

"I don't know; there *was* nothing to be said;"

and then, "You are married, aren't you?" I nodded; she went on: "I want to know your wife; you must introduce me."

"With pleasure," I replied: "but my answer; you will explain the mystery now."

"But you must have understood?"

"No; I did not, I assure you, and even now I can't make out why you acted as you did.

"How strange!" And she laughed, looking away from me. On reflection afterwards, it seemed to me that this laughter of hers was a trifle forced; but I may be mistaken. At the time I didn't remark the false note. How strange!" she repeated; and then, with sudden gravity, "Shall I dot the '*is*' and cross the '*ts*' for you, and confess? I wonder will it be good for my soul. The truth is very simple, and yet very hard to tell. I loved you. Oh! as a child, of course, I mean, but with an ideal passion. You never guessed it? I'm glad. Do you know, I think it began that night at the theatre. You won something of the charm of that fatal music that seemed to me the voice of my soul's desire. It transformed me; the tide of it swept through me, and ebbed and flowed in me, and bore me away out upon it till the sweet tears scalded my eyes and made my heart ache. After that my guard broke down before you; the way was open and you took possession of the empty throne. How I loved you! I invested you with every grace and every power; you were the lay figure and I the artist. Forgive me, I don't mean to hurt you; but that's the truth. You brought the wild fresh air of struggle and triumph into

our close narrow life, and I made a hero of you, that was all.

"I think I began by pitying you; even in short frocks some of us are mothers. I saw that Mabel didn't love you and was indignant with her. After seeing her with you my heart has ached for you, and I've gone out of the room hating her make-believe of love and stopped in the hall to talk to your coat. How I used to kiss and stroke it and put my cheek against it and whisper sweet things to it! 'Tell him, dear coat,' I used to say, 'that I love him, and he mustn't be sad or lonely. Tell him—tell him that I love him.' I used to believe that unconsciously you must receive some comfort from those assurances.

"Do you remember the dinner when you touched me? I stopped you; I was so glad at heart that I had to pretend to be angry for fear you'd understand. And that afternoon when you kissed me; I provoked it—on purpose? I don't know. I do know that I resisted as long as I could, and when I could resist no longer, *you stopped.* How the passion of shame hurt me then! I thought I should die of it, and then I thought of the sweet unknown affection I had been giving you—all past and at an end—and the tears came. . . . Well, there's my confession. You see now that I could not answer your letters. I had to win back self-respect, and I did."

* * * * *

There; that's all the story. I know I've told it badly, but I've done my best. What did I say to

her? I played the fool. I could find nothing sensible to say; I held my head in my hands and muttered:

"And now?"

"And now," she repeated, smiling through wet eyes, "I'm grown up and you're married, and I want to know your wife."

"And that's all?" I blundered on.

"All?" she said; "all—and enough too, I should think." Her voice had changed and grown hard; even as a girl she was quick-tempered: "Do you know I look at you and can't tell what possessed me, what I could have seen in you? You're not even like the mental picture I had made of you. I don't know how I could have dressed you up in those heroic vestments. When I look at you I wonder at myself. I must really ask your wife what she sees in you; for——"

At last I came to sense; the beautiful play was over, and I had offended her; but she had gone too far in punishment: the words came to me:

"If you go on hurting me, I shall think you are daring me again."

The blood surged to the roots of her hair; she rose and took the arm of a man who had just come up, and vanished from my sight; and with her going romance died out of my life, and the grey walls of the ordinary shrank round and hemmed me in for ever.

In the years that have elapsed since, my business instincts have often forced me to try and strike a balance: I was richer by a wonderful memory and

poorer by the sense of incalculable loss. Sometimes I try to console myself with the thought that perhaps that is all life holds, even for the luckiest of us.

PROFIT AND LOSS

PROFIT AND LOSS

I

THE great dry-goods store was silent and shadowful. A misty light glimmering through the frosted glass of a little office at the back discovered dimly the lines of counters stretching away into the darkness and the spectral grey-brown hangings which hid the shelves of goods. In the office a man sat working amid a pile of account-books. He was very young—to judge by his thin, dark moustache not more than two or three and twenty years of age, but the vertical lines between his eyebrows and a certain hardness of compressed lips made him appear five years older. David Tryon was not to be called good-looking, though his features were sharply cut and for the most part regular, and his dark eyes intent with purpose. His ugliest trait, a long square chin, deepened the impression made by brow and eyes and imparted to his face a character of extraordinary resolution. As he laid down his pen and closed the ledger he had been using, an expression of complete lassitude came over his tensely-strung features; he was evidently exhausted. The July day had been excessively hot, and the summer stock-taking had made his labour as cashier very heavy. For a week past he had

worked eighteen hours out of every twenty-four, and now he had just completed the annual statement and drawn out the profit and loss account. This task was supposed to take about a month, but Tryon knew that his principal had some special reason for wishing to ascertain as soon as possible how his affairs stood, and accordingly he had overworked himself, as ambitious young men of a nervous, bilious temperament are apt to do. He was so worn out that he could scarcely think; sleepiness seemed to blunt and numb his senses. He didn't notice the opening of the office-door, and he started when he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder and found himself face to face with his chief, Mr. Jefferson Boulger. Tryon was greatly surprised. Mr. Boulger lived in the country, and it was most unusual to see him in the store at ten o'clock at night.

"Been working hard as usual, Dave," said his employer pleasantly, as the young man started to his feet and roughly brushed his hair back with his hand as if to drive away his weariness.

"I guess it'll worry you to get out the balance-sheet this year—eh?"

"It has cost some work," Tryon replied, "but it's done now and the statement of profit and loss as well."

"You don't say! I reckoned 'twould take another week at least. But you're real smart at figures, and as I was in town I thought I'd look in on the chance"—here Mr. Boulger as if correcting himself added hastily, "That is, I s'posed you'd know about how we stood, and anyway I'd have a

talk with you. Is that it?" and he pointed to a sheet of foolscap on the desk.

"That's it," Tryon answered, handing the paper to his chief.

Mr. Boulger had a large experience of life and some quickness of perception, but he was not a good enough actor at this moment to conceal his emotion. Though he turned sideways half-hiding his face as if to read the statement by the lamp, his nervousness was manifest. In truth, he had good reason for anxiety.

Mr. Boulger was a handsome man—tall and well-formed, with regular features, large blue eyes, and fair moustache. In spite of his fifty-five years he seemed to be in his prime; life had always been easy to him; his good looks had made it easy. They had won for him when still a young man a wife with money and connections, and this circumstance had transformed him from a clerk into the owner of a business at the time when Kansas City began to grow with such rapidity that almost every use of capital brought large profits. Mr. Boulger was sufficiently vain of his person, but he was far vainer of his intelligence. He ascribed all his success in life to his ability; the extraordinary chances which had favoured him, never entered into his thoughts. It had, however, been borne in upon him lately that the prosperity of his business was anything but assured. The causes of this phenomenon lay beyond his powers of vision. The truth was that the growth of Kansas City had begun to attract attention throughout the Union. Capitalists from Eastern cities had flocked in and

established business-houses on a scale formerly unknown in the Western town. And Mr. Boulger had not kept pace with these new competitors, while for reasons which will soon be set forth, his expenses, always large, had of late been very largely increased. For some time past he had been short of money; he was now embarrassed for want of it; and a series of novel and unpleasant experiences had, at length, made him anxious. Hence his excitement when he took up the statement which must show his exact position. Mechanically he turned over the pages without seeing the figures, though pretending to scan them closely, but when he came to the nett results his surprise and fear overcame his prudence:

"A million! A million of goods here?"

"Yes," said Tryon, as if following the thread of the elder man's thought. "The buyers this year have been—unlucky; the silk and velvet patterns have not gone off well, and in the cotton goods Marchants have taken nearly all the trade away from us by cutting prices, and so the balance is bad."

"Bad," repeated Mr. Boulger, while his blue eyes dilated with mingled fear and anger. "Bad. I reckon 'tis bad. I don't see how it could be much worse. The buyers must go. They ain't worth their salt. Why, we sold more than this, fifteen years ago, when a hundred thousand dollars would have bought up the whole place. Bad," and his voice rose passionately, "the salesmen must be bad too. I don't believe," he went on, bringing his shapely hand down on the desk with a thump in

his excitement, "I don't believe there's a man in the place does his work properly—of course except you, Dave."

"That ain't quite so," Tryon objected. "The salesmen are fairly good, and they do their best. But the buyers don't seem to know what the folk out here want, and there's no one to put them right."

"It's just too bad," resumed Mr. Boulger, who seemed to have overheard Tryon's concluding words. "Too bad. Year after year the stock gets larger, and these last four or five years the sales have been fallin' off. Why, I remember when I first took over the place. I ran the sales up year after year, and the stock remained about the same. Then I extended the business; made this the biggest dry-goods house in all the West; and still we used to be short of stock often. Now it seems as if nothin' would go—nothin'. . . . I wish I'd had a son to take my place. No business goes well unless the head's there all the time, and since that fever four years ago I've not been able to stick to work as I used to do. I guess that's got something to do with it. I wish I'd had a son. But there! I believed the store would run itself; it always seemed so easy to make things go well; and then I thought that you, Dave, would look after everything. Why, since I first took you in, I've just pushed you right along till you've got the best place in the house, and now——"

"You forget, Mr. Boulger, that when I advised Williams three years ago what to buy, he went to you, and you told me to mind my own business

and not to interfere with the buying. But even now," Tryon went on, with keen decision in his voice, "it's not too late to alter. I'll undertake, if you give me the power, to clear out a quarter, at least, of this stock within the year." (Mr. Boulger made a gesture of hopelessness.) "I mean at fair prices. Of course, there'd be a loss, but not much. Though I'd rather realise three-quarters of the stock for what it would bring, and then start fresh—most of it's out of fashion. There's no reason why the business shouldn't go better than ever it has gone. For though Marchants are smart competitors, the town's growing very fast, and there's room enough for us all."

"Perhaps, but not time enough, Dave, not time enough." And then, as if taking up a new train of thought, and abandoning his despairing meditation, Mr. Boulger laid his hand on Tryon's shoulder, and went on earnestly:

"I've been kind to you, Dave, and I guess you won't go back on me now. No, I'm sure you won't. Well, time's what we want—time and money. You're surprised. It seems strange, don't it? but it's true. My home costs a good deal; I've always lived well. And when Milly was married I had to fit her out. I put up the house for her and all that, and gave her a good many thousand dollars besides. I don't hold with the Yankee idea that daughters should go empty-handed to their husbands. And Mrs. Boulger and the younger girls spent a pile in Europe. I guess livin's dear there. And they had to make some sort of a show. Any way, I'm very short now. There's no doubt about

that. Stewart wants a large cheque to clear his account, and I don't like to try to borrow from the bank here—even if they'd lend it. I don't know why I talk to you like this, Dave; but I guess you know about how matters stand, and I've always liked you. You know that. . . .

"I didn't realise at first how the business was goin'. I had kinder got used to success, and took things too easily, hopin' for better times; and now, just when I had made up my mind to work again —you may have noticed I've come regularly to business this last month—it's too late. There's a million on these shelves, and I'm pressed, worried for a hundred thousand dollars. It's too bad!"

"But can't you sell your real estate, Mr. Boulger, and your trotting horses? I don't mean your house, but the farms and——"

Mr. Boulger shook his head mournfully.

"I've done everything, Dave. The real estate is mortgaged, and if I sold my trottin' horses every one would talk and my credit would be gone. No," he added, shortly, "that's not the way." Then, after a pause, during which his fine eyes had taken in the young man's excitement and a certain pained, embarrassed look on the nervous face, he repeated, "That's no good." The silence that ensued was painful to Tryon; evidently he was at a loss what to advise.

Suddenly Mr. Boulger asked, as if the thought had just come into his head.

"What's the place insured for? A million at least, ain't it?"

"About that, I think, but it's placed in so many

different companies that I couldn't tell exactly without looking it up in the books."

"That ain't necessary," Mr. Boulger went on; "I don't put all my eggs in one basket. It would be worth while for any Insurance Office to contest a claim of a million, but when a loss is small, an Insurance Company prefers to pay up promptly." The look of comprehension which came over Tryon's face at this remark stimulated the vanity of the older man, who went on complacently: "Besides, I guess you'll find the London, Liverpool and Globe is down for the largest amount, and it sort o' way consoles Americans when foreigners lose more than they do. I haven't lost all business sense yet, I reckon. Any way I feel certain that if the place burnt down I'd get every cent of the insurance money. An' think what that would do, Dave; 'twould set us all O. K. again. A million. I wish the store would catch fire an' burn right out. I'd give a hundred thousand dollars to get rid of all that stock—an' be glad to do it." Here Mr. Boulger paused significantly as if inviting an answer. But Tryon didn't speak, couldn't speak indeed, though it was manifest that he had fully grasped his principal's meaning.

Tryon's parentage and training had been peculiar. He had never known his father, who had died when he was still a young child. He had been brought up entirely by his mother, and a better nurture in some respects no boy ever enjoyed; for Mrs. Tryon was one of those rare persons whose good qualities inspire affectionate admiration. Before her marriage she had been a schoolmistress

in Hanley, Vermont, and when her husband died, a few years after their emigration to Missouri, she returned to her old occupation with an eagerness that testified eloquently to the trials of her married life. Of these she never spoke, even to her son. She talked to Dave of his father's brains and quickness; but she seemed to have forgotten the fits of drunkenness that had turned her life into a martyrdom of shame. Her energy and optimism made her school-work enjoyable to her, but, curiously enough, she attributed her success as a teacher, not to her moral qualities, not to the sound judgment, amiability, and firmness which she possessed in an eminent degree, but to her intelligence. She had always been "smart and spry," she thought proudly, and it was perhaps the cruellest disappointment of her life to find that her son Dave was not "smart." She had, however, endowed him with not a little of her own strength of character, and when he was about thirteen, he found with surprise that he was gradually outstripping boys whom for years he had regarded as cleverer than himself. This consciousness brought about a revulsion in his nature; stubborn humility gave place to eager pride, and under the impulse of this new feeling, he redoubled his exertions at a time when most of his school-fellows, quickening with the passions and hopes of approaching manhood, began to lose interest in the routine of lessons. It was one of the sweetest moments in his life when his mother declared with glad tears that he had completely outgrown her assistance. About this time, on the very threshold of

youth, Dave met Miss Georgie Boulger. She entered the high-school as a girl of fourteen, when he was on the point of leaving it at sixteen, with the reputation of having easily surpassed all his competitors. But he had never spoken first to a girl in his life, and it never entered his head to speak to Miss Georgie Boulger who wore a fur cloak, and was accompanied to and from school by a negro servant. It was not her social superiority, however, which won Tryon, although undoubtedly it attracted him, but Georgie's aplomb and talkativeness and, above all, her kindness to him. She spoke to him first about a difficulty in a lesson, and seemed grateful for the help which he bashfully offered. The pair soon became fast friends. Miss Georgie's girlish vanity was gratified by her conquest. The strength of Tryon's character, his pride and gratitude, were all enlisted on the side of his affection. He no more let his thoughts wander from the young girl than he would have dreamed of giving up a problem unsolved. Success, he had found out, came by perseverance, and, as usual, the effort required for success—all the sacrifices it demanded—served to increase his desire. When his mother, delighted with his steadiness and boyish triumphs, pressed him to continue his studies, and go to the university, he wouldn't hear of it. He'd try to get a place in Boulger's store; she had worked long enough for him; he wanted to help her now; and at last the mother, touched to the heart by the devotion which she had given, but never expected to receive, yielded.

Tryon took up his work in the store as he had studied in school, with the difference that now he made light of difficulties which he felt sure of his own power to overcome. In a very few months Mr. Boulger learned to appreciate his assistant cashier, who certainly knew more about the stock and business than anyone else in the place. And when three or four years later, his chief cashier and manager, Mr. Curtis, died suddenly, Mr. Boulger at once offered his place to Tryon, with a salary of a hundred and fifty dollars a month. But when he found that this advancement only intensified his young cashier's energy and devotion, instead of further increasing his salary he began to treat him with a great show of kindness, and at last got into the habit of frequently inviting him to come out to his house and spend the night. There Tryon renewed acquaintance with Miss Georgie, who responded to his advances with the old kindliness and laughing good temper, touched to a keener issue by a certain maidenly sense of what courtship meant. Tryon had vastly improved in manner and bearing in the five years which had passed since he left school, and though he was not fully conscious of this, or of the natural effect upon a girl's nature of an assured and resolute self-possession, Miss Georgie noted and admired the change. Tryon felt simply that his perseverance was again meeting with its reward; he had but to work he thought and he'd reach this goal, too, when the news came that the Boulger girls with their mother were going for a trip to Europe.

Then for the first time since his boyhood he

realised the full bitterness of failure, intensified in this case by the hopes of success which he had cherished. But with the years his character had grown in strength, and as soon as he had said farewell he turned again to his work with renewed vigour. Hadn't Georgie, in reply to his expressed fear that in Europe she'd forget old friends, laughed up in his face with the words, "Anyway, I won't forget you, Mr. Tryon"? That was hope enough for his persistent and steadfast nature. And when the trip of six months lengthened to a year, and when the year became two, his hopes grew with his own growth in self-confidence. The fact was always there that Miss Georgie was still unmarried, and that encouraged him.

In the years which Tryon had passed in Boulger's, there had taken place that change in the business which has already been noticed. Naturally enough Tryon was the first to feel the keener competition, and to realise the necessity of meeting it by increased exertions. But here he found himself thwarted by his chief. The influence which each of these men exercised upon the other was anything but happy. Just at the time when Mr. Boulger began to feel that he deserved rest, Tryon's energy and ability rendered it unnecessary for him to occupy himself actively in the store. Mr. Boulger, too, had found that Tryon knew more about the business than he did, and this consciousness, while giving him freedom, irritated his restless vanity. When Tryon came to him with suggestions he assented to them with difficulty, even when he understood their value and importance,

but whenever he could, without manifestly injuring the business, he waved the young man's proposals loftily, or even contemptuously aside. Tryon, he felt, was inclined "to play boss." His prolonged absence from business made it impossible for Mr. Boulger to understand the changing conditions of trade, and so it came about that while unable himself to make head against his new competitors, he wouldn't allow Tryon to do his best to stem the tide. The business went from bad to worse. It would be difficult to describe Tryon's continual, resolute efforts to constrain fortune. All was in vain; Mr. Boulger's jealousy of him foiled his best plans. Still what he could do he did, and at length, to brighten his almost hopeless labour, came the news that Mrs. Boulger and her daughters had returned home. But weeks passed, and still his employer didn't invite him to his house, and so the temptation came to Tryon at a moment when he was cast down in spirit by the fear that his efforts to better the business had lost him Mr. Boulger's liking, and with it all chance of winning his daughter, Georgie.

If Mr. Boulger had been gifted with omniscience he could hardly have chosen a fitter moment for his proposal. And yet when he spoke Tryon kept silent. The plan suggested by his chief shocked him. His first movement was one of instinctive, passionate recoil. But he had laboured incessantly, with all nerves strung, for years, in order to bring himself nearer to Georgie; and he curbed his first impulse of indignation, fearing that if he gave way to it, his path to her would

be blocked for ever. And once his honest instincts were held in silence, the issue of the struggle was not doubtful. If it is true that one's actions gradually change the character, it is also true that thoughts and desires long persisted in, modify the texture of the mind. From childhood David Tryon had been trained to think chiefly of success. The triumphs of successful endeavour had hitherto been his chief pleasures; how was he now to give up all that was delightful to him in life when he had never so much as contemplated the possibility of such renunciation? Having conquered the first movement of revolt, the intoxication of an immediate triumph overpowered him. He did not dwell long upon the condition; he had been trained in a school of life which judges by results, and is little scrupulous as to means. He could not help feeling that an opportunity now presented itself to him which might never come again, an opportunity which opened a broad road to the object of his desires. It was not the money-bribe which tempted him as much as the escape from a harassed and fettered activity into a wide field of free effort, and—Georgie. Yet—

While Tryon stood to all appearance impassive and thoughtful Mr. Boulger grew impatient. He felt that he had gone too far to recede; he must go on and take the risk of refusal. Tryon's silence must mean consent. Besides, his position was desperate and this last throw, even if it failed, would leave him no worse off than he had been before speaking. No one, he thought, would believe Tryon's word against his. But evidently he must

bid higher—that was plain. So he began again in a strained voice:

"Dave, you see I trust you, and a hundred thousand dollars or say a hundred and fifty thousand ain't to be won every day. What do you say?" Then impatience mastered him, and he added,

"Will you do it? That's the point. You ain't afraid, I know, and the risk ain't anythin', but will you?"

The words, the manner, the impatient eagerness of the voice recalled Tryon's business wits. Often in his school days his slowness in grasping the full import of a question had stood him in good stead, and as the slowness changed to quickness of apprehension by dint of effort and concentrated attention, he had made it a habit to think carefully before he spoke, having again and again realised the advantages of second thoughts. Accordingly, though his heart was beating fast and hard, he held the question before him and forced himself to consider it in all its bearings, understanding that his silence had already induced Mr. Boulger to increase his offer and that to take time might well serve him in more ways than one. Besides, at the bottom of his heart he hated the proposal. Was there no other way? Yet he must not offend Georgie's father. If only—

"If you'd renew that bill of Stewart's for thirty days and give me a free hand here, we could have a clearance sale that would meet the bill and give us money to go on with. This store's a fortune. The other thing's foolish."

"The bill has been renewed twice and they won't renew it again, and the bank won't take it up—I'm in debt to the bank. Dave, there's no other way out—not one. Will you take a hundred and fifty thousand dollars and set me on my feet again—that's the question?"

"I'd rather work and wait. Crime—"

"Oh, pshaw!" And Mr. Boulger laughed noisily to conceal his agitation. "There ain't no risk. With your head, Dave, one don't get caught, and a man can work and wait a long time before he gets a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. You know that as well as I do."

"The risk's there and I hate it; 'tisn't needed. Besides, your promise—"

"Why, Dave, I guess you can trust me—I don't go back on my word, you know that. I've shown you, I reckon, that I like you and think a heap of you. Of course I'd pay what I say I would." Mr. Boulger spoke with the accents of an almost affectionate reproach. He was evidently feverishly anxious.

"Do you mean a promissory note—three months after date?"

"Dave, I can't do that. You might die or—but I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make you manager right off and give you five thousand a year and an engagement for five years certain. Then if I got the insurance money and didn't want to pay you, you'd have a *primâ-facie* case against me. The largeness of the salary would testify against me—will that do?"

"How could I sue you without confessing."

"What am I to do?" exclaimed Mr. Boulger, exasperated by the reasonableness of the objection and intensely desirous, as only a weak nature is, to have the matter settled without further suspense.

"I can't see any way but a promissory note. It might be deposited with some third person who would keep it until we both asked him to return it."

"No. I can't do that. Why should you and I, Dave, give ourselves into the power of any third party. I'll make you manager at once and bind the agreement as I said, but the note's foolish. You can surely trust me?"

Tryon knew Mr. Boulger well enough to know that when pressed too far he was apt to become stupidly obstinate. After a short pause for thought he began:

"The risk's great; the store mightn't be burned out; the fire brigade's well organised; but what I undertake to do, shall be done as well as I can do it. Yet I must think of myself, too. Do you mind," and here he looked Mr. Boulger in the face, "giving that note to Miss Georgie to keep? I guess you can trust her." In spite of himself a light as of comprehension and satisfaction came over the upper part of Mr. Boulger's countenance. Quickly Tryon went on: "You might take me out with you some evening. If she tells me she'll keep the paper for two months and then give it to me or open it herself before us, and decide between us, I shall be content."

"If you care for Georgie," broke in Mr. Boul-

ger, joyously, "the matter's settled. Georgie's good; she'll not go back on either of us, and I had reckoned anyway on givin' her nearly as much when she married."

"Yes," answered Tryon, "I love her, or else I'd never think of doing what you want."

"Pshaw, man!" Mr. Boulger said loudly, "the risk ain't worth considerin'. Everything'll turn out right as I always felt it must. Dave, I'm real glad. There's no one I'd rather have for a son-in-law than you—no one. I'm glad I came in this evenin'. Now I can go home and sleep with my mind at rest. But 'twas a near thing; that bill of Stewart's 'll fall due in six weeks, and my note at the bank, too. I guess we'll be able to pay them, eh, Dave?"

The loud satisfaction, the inconsequent speech, grated upon Tryon's nerves. Oppressed by doubts he could not still, he answered coldly:

"Yes, perhaps you will."

The words and voice seemed to Mr. Boulger to indicate doubt if not regret. Accordingly he hastened to clinch the bargain without delay, and to give vent to his relief and joy in what seemed to him a generous way. Putting his arm on the young man's shoulder, he exclaimed, with kindly eagerness:

"But I was forgettin'! The least I can do is to make my son-in-law manager right off, eh, Dave? I can do that right now. An' it'll show you that I'm willin' to keep my word."

Tryon protested sincerely, "'twas time enough for that; a day or two wouldn't matter; 'twould

be better to sleep on it,"—and so forth. His inheritance of honest instincts had begun to stir in him again, and made him hesitate to engage himself. But Mr. Boulger wouldn't be denied. Tryon's protestations only excited him to immediate action; he sat down at the desk and wrote the appointment. As he dried the ink the thought came to him that he was giving something for nothing; but he consoled himself by calling to mind the powers employers possessed to rid themselves of cashiers, or even managers, who didn't please them. Besides, Tryon was worth the money in any house of business, and as a son-in-law he'd be more easily dealt with;—Mr. Boulger's fears prevented him from thinking clearly. Folding the paper carefully he handed it to Tryon.

"There, Dave," he said, trying to speak impressively, "that's a long step towards fortune. I guess managers often turn into partners. An' I don't wish for a better partner than you. I'll get that other thing written right soon, and I'll speak to Mrs. Boulger to-night. Then you can come out whenever you like." With the feeling that he had done his best, and might lose all influence over his seemingly impassive listener if he continued, he added shortly—

"Now, I guess, I'll have to be goin'. Good night, Dave," and left the store. But before he had walked a hundred yards towards the livery-stable where he had "put up" his horses and buggy, he had begun, not only to regret his decision, but to resolve to modify it. His thoughts ran thus:

"He's smart, I guess, very smart. I didn't intend to make him manager or to offer more than a hundred thousand. I hadn't no need to; he's in love with Georgie; he'd have done it for her, perhaps. Why, he said so. He did! I don't mind the hundred thousand, though it's too much—far too much. Any young man would have done it for fifty. I was too hasty, though I was in a real tight place. And then, as manager he'll want to do everythin'. I'll have to give way *before*—and *afterwards* it'll be hard to alter. I was too hasty, I was, and too generous. That's always been my fault—generosity. I like to do things largely; I hate meanness. And then I give myself away every time." But as this course of self-reproach recalled unpleasant memories, Mr. Boulger broke it off:

"What's to be done now? Of course, I want to treat him fairly,—I guess I'll draw that note and leave the sum blank. Then I'll say, 'See here, Dave, you belong to us now, and I've two other girls; I reckon I'll fill this in for a hundred thousand, eh?' He can't object—put in that way. He won't: he wants Georgie. He'll have seen her then and talked to her. I guess it'll be all right. He'll do it: there's no fear about that. . . .

"Damn those insurance companies anyway. They've got premiums out of me for thirty years. Now, it's my turn. I'm only getting back my own money from them after all."

David Tryon wasn't able to console himself so easily, nor so completely. Brought face to face with fraud and crime, his deeper nature revolted.

Yet his own dissatisfied conscience forced him to think with bitterest contempt of Mr. Boulger.

"He wouldn't do the work nor let me do it either. The vain fool! Always running about showing off, and leaving his business to take care of itself, and this is what it has come to. I've to save him, and how! In six months the business properly worked would bring him out all right, but he goes and leaves everything to the last moment, and then, puts it all on to me."

This train of thought, however, seemed to Tryon unprofitable; his understanding of his own resolution forced him to renounce the pleasure of condemning his master. "I guess he only acted according to his nature—and now I've to go right on."

Characteristically he thought first of what he ought to do, the steps which should be taken. Forethought would avert suspicion. In outline at least the enterprise was soon clear to him. He trusted much to time and careful deliberation; he intended to consider the whole scheme again and again before proceeding to carry it into execution. Meanwhile he wouldn't delay any needful preparation. Having decided so much, he allowed his thoughts to wander. It was characteristic of his nature that they turned first to his mother, and to the joy she would feel in his success. Tryon was neither passionate nor very affectionate, but his affections were of those which grow with custom and association; and the isolation of the life he had led with his widowed mother made him connect her with himself in an intimate community

of feeling and interest. It irritated him, therefore, to realise all at once that he could take no pleasure in his mother's delight; he felt distinctly that she wouldn't be glad if she knew all, and the sincerity in him prevented him from sharing even in anticipation in her joy.

As he put the agreement in his pocket, turned out the lamp, and set forth for home, it came to him suddenly that if his mother's suspicions were aroused, if the rapidity of his rise led her to fear, however vaguely, anything resembling the truth, she would certainly oppose his design with all her strength. For the first time there was a gulf between them. But instead of setting himself to think of the meaning and cause of this separation he simply resolved to pretend to be frank and deceive her. His mind was made up. It was better that she should know nothing. Yet as he reached the house he felt intensely uncomfortable. Deceit was painful to him. He resolved to say as little as possible.

According to her invariable custom, his mother was waiting up for him. When he spoke to her of getting a larger house and engaging a "help," and showed her the agreement, attributing his advancement to the way he had worked in getting out the balance-sheet, she seemed in no way surprised, though the sudden delight brought quick tears to her eyes. Her boy thought of her first of all. This was perhaps the heart of her joy, and yet she gave no expression to it in words. Even when most deeply moved, men and women speak generally from the ruffled surface of their souls. The

tranquil depths of perfect honesty and self-abnegation in this mother-heart could not come easily to expression.

"It makes me very happy for you, Dave," she said, trying to smile, "but you deserve it all; you've worked night and day; all last night you were writing. Oh, I heard you. A mother doesn't sleep when her son's waking. . . . I've got more happiness through you than I ever expected in this world. It makes me feel as if all my prayers had been answered. God's very good to me, Dave." And through her tears she added, with a deprecating smile, "To think I used to be afraid you weren't smart!"

With a sigh of relief Tryon felt that the chief ordeal was passed; he felt, too, somewhat to his surprise, that he did enjoy his mother's deep happiness, though he knew he had no right to enjoy it. Success, he understood, might bring him more even than assured position and wealth; it might bring content. After a talk, which was cut short by his mother insisting that he must go to bed and get a good rest, Tryon went to his room to think of Georgie. He felt certain that under the present circumstances she wouldn't refuse him. And in his self-controlled nature, desires awoke alien to his habit and coloured the picture his fancy painted of a future passed between his mother and his wife.

Long after her son had gone to sleep the mother sat nursing her delight, following it into all its possibilities. What wouldn't her Dave do and become? A member of Congress, perhaps, loved and

honoured by all, as he deserved. Woman-like she had made an idol of him ever since his school-boy triumphs; and to her larger, more expansive, and more generous nature his cool self-restraint and steady purpose seemed the ideal of noble manhood. And mingled with her admiration of his strength and resolution, was an intense tingling gratitude for his affection. He had thought first of her and her wellbeing. At the remembrance of his words quick, sweet tears of pleasure came again to her eyes. A sense of life's compensations penetrated her as she thought of her husband and son together. Yet she was superstitiously afraid to admit even to herself what she felt to be the fact, that she was blessed in her son beyond her own deserts, beyond all previous suffering. Great joy, she felt, must be followed by lasting sorrow. She set herself, therefore, to wonder when he would marry, and whom he would choose. No one in Kansas City was at all worthy of him; she'd advise him to wait; meanwhile she'd look out for him, for she knew exactly the sort of woman who would make him happy. And yet not even the ideal in her mind was worthy of her son—of Dave!

II

About a week after Mr. Boulger's nocturnal visit to his house of business, his wife and his three unmarried daughters were assembled in the drawing-room of their country residence, awaiting his arrival, and that of the manager, Mr. Tryon,

whom, to their surprise, Mr. Boulger seemed resolved to honour. A word or two about Mrs. Boulger and her daughters may not be out of place here.

In person Mrs. Boulger was thin and dry, but in spite of sallow complexion and round black eyes the sharp-featured face and tall figure had a certain dignity. She belonged, as she was pleased to inform everyone, to an old Southern family—a family, she used to add, that had been slave-holders "for generations." In truth, the little plantation of the Carters had been bought by the grandfather, but as she advanced in life, and her position improved, Mrs. Boulger's ancestors grew in number and legendary importance. Pride was her dominant quality and, in process of time, it had swollen to such exaggeration that it bred virtues in her, foreign to her nature. Just as it would have been difficult to induce her to do anything which seemed to her unworthy of a great position, so nothing would prevent her doing what she thought her position demanded. She lived, therefore, at the rate which her ever-increasing knowledge of luxuries required, careless of the fact that in the last years she had spent more than her husband could earn.

The eldest daughter, Ada, resembled her mother save that she was good-looking, well-educated and accepted in faith her mother's imaginary descent and hereditary splendour. She was selfish, as her mother was, unconsciously and intensely, with a complacent self-approval that her mother could hardly reach. The unity of type of Mrs. Boulger

and Ada had had certain curious effects upon the two younger girls.

Ivy, the youngest, seemed in many ways to take after her father. In person she was an inferior copy—small and slight of figure, with a doll's face. The self-satisfied pride of her mother and eldest sister had intensified and developed her egotism to deliberate and conscious purpose. Her emulative instincts and her desire to please had led her to cultivate her manners, which would have been perfect had she been able to comprehend any nature other than her own. Her ruthless self-seeking and obstinacy had won the unwilling respect even of her mother, and she was undoubtedly her father's favourite.

Georgie, on the other hand, was by nature honest, frank and kindly. She tried to dwell on the good qualities of her mother and sisters, but unknown to herself their egotism brought out and developed the unselfishness in her. She found it easy to yield to the demands they were continually making on her good-nature; though sometimes she rendered service with a certain contempt. For Georgie was not a saint to whom self-sacrifice was a pleasure, but a sound-hearted girl with a strong craving for affection. To her alone the return to Kansas City was a source of satisfaction. She looked forward hopefully and with a confused yet eager anticipation of life's joy and purpose to the meeting with Tryon, whom she had liked and trusted from the first. She thought of herself and even of her person with reasonable pleasure. She knew perfectly well that she was not so tall

or elegant as Ada, but she was stronger and had better health. Again and again, too, she had noticed that if men were first attracted by Ada's good looks and stateliness or by Ivy's charming manners and affectation of intense interest, the majority of them came gradually to pay her attentions which, if not passionate, were, at least, constant and sincere. She had, accordingly, a premonition that life would afford her what she most desired, and therewith she was content. If her outlook was narrow it was clear. She was truthful and trustworthy, as are the unimaginative. Neither her father nor Tryon had reason to fear betrayal from her; she held to the plain rules of conduct and liked the straight lines cut by American roads and streets. As soon as her father had spoken of Tryon, even before he mentioned his promotion to the post of manager she had divined that her future was intimately concerned. And this gratified not only the better part of her nature but also a certain vanity. She had always wished to be married before either of her sisters; she felt that she had more affection to give than they possessed, and Ivy's vanity and selfishness and Ada's complacent pride seemed to her to render them distinctly her inferiors.

In spite of the unusual enthusiasm with which Mr. Boulger spoke of Tryon, neither Mrs. Boulger nor Ada was at all inclined to attribute much importance to his visit. They knew themselves to be far above clerkdom. But Ivy noticed at once that her father seemed to speak at Georgie in particular, and it was easy for her to interpret her

favourite sister's manner. When she entered the drawing-room she saw that Georgie, like herself, had dressed with more than ordinary care. A certain feminine jealousy in her came at once to speech, though she tried to modify the bitterness of her words because it was no part of her policy to offend the sister who was continually doing her kindnesses, and whom she liked as much as she could like any one.

"I'm afraid," she said carelessly, "it's no use for you and me to get ourselves up for Mr. Tryon while Ada's there. We haven't a chance with her. After all, I don't mind. I don't want papa's manager. But it's a pity you're not looking your best to-day—you've too much colour."

Georgie felt the keenness of the shaft which, indeed deepened the healthy flush of her cheeks, but she maintained her self-control, and after a short pause, spoke of indifferent things.

A few minutes later, just after the lights had been brought in, and the windows closed, Mr. Boulger and Tryon entered the room. Mrs. Boulger was polite, and even pleasant to Tryon, as she always was to new acquaintances, and Ada attempted to appropriate him as if each and every man must needs wish to be at her feet. Tryon, though not at ease, showed to advantage. His purpose was so strong that nothing of the self-conscious awkwardness of his youth was visible, and when, after replying politely to the elder sister, he turned to Georgie, she was astonished by the improvement in him. He was more manly, masterful even, she thought, with a flush of pleas-

ure, which gave her a charming expression of girlish embarrassment. Besides, she really felt somewhat shy. The fidelity in Tryon's look brought the future very close to her, and she was astonished at the strength of the feelings he called forth in her.

The evening passed pleasantly enough. Ada, it is true, was at times contemptuous; Ivy made remarks which were significant and slightly malicious, but Mr. Boulger's unceasing good-humour, and Mrs. Boulger's pleasure in recounting her European experiences made things go smoothly. From her conversation, Tryon gathered that Mrs. Boulger looked upon America since the abolition of slavery as a very poor place; "The servants were ill-taught and independent," was a phrase, the sense of which he could not seize. The dinner seemed to him oppressive in length; he felt that it wasn't right for people to drink wine with their meals, and that the house was too splendid to be comfortable. He told his mother afterwards that it was like being dressed always in one's best clothes. But Georgie's eyes and words showed him that she, at any rate, understood and appreciated him, and that was enough. After dinner, too, she arranged matters so that Tryon could talk to her *tête-à-tête,* and when he hoped that she had kept her promise not to forget old friends, she replied without affectation that she had not forgotten him. Her frankness put him at his ease, and to his own surprise he found himself speaking to her with interest of the business and the improvements he hoped to effect in it. The insight

and energy in him impressed her, but more still the strength and persistence which she felt to be the foundation of his character. Once, at least, she caught herself blushing, half with surprise at an incautious phrase which betrayed the strength of her feeling for him. As he grew in her esteem she showed a good humour and enjoyment which made her quite pretty. In fine, they both appeared at their best; they were both conscious of this, and each accordingly felt increased sympathy for the other. Towards eleven o'clock Mr. Boulger approached them.

"Georgie," he said, in a low voice, after a few careless sentences, "we both want you to come down early to-morrow morning; we've something to talk over with you, and as Dave wants to go to business before eight o'clock, you should be down at seven to give him and me breakfast."

Mr. Boulger's tone and confidential manner were highly significant. Most girls would have felt somewhat embarrassed at the quick approach of the decisive moment, but Georgie answered quite naturally:

"All right, father, I'll be here at half-past six. Now it's time to go to bed, I suppose, though, thanks to Mr. Tryon, the evening has seemed very short."

For some time after he reached his room, Tryon gave himself up to thought. He felt certain that Georgie cared for him, and that she would consent to be his wife. Her frankness and good humour had been very pleasant to him, almost as delightful in fact as certain signs of affection which he re-

called with joy. On all points save one his mind was at rest. Her frank affection had increased his confidence in her to such an extent that he felt inclined to confide in her without reserve. She deserved complete trust, he knew, and he felt that she ought to know beforehand what he intended to do. The influence of his business training had been so immoral that he would have decided probably to tell her his secret had not his high opinion of his mother restrained him. Perhaps Georgie would take the same view of it as his mother would. Perhaps? Certainly. Then there was nothing more to think of; he would say nothing, and go ahead.

* * * * *

The next morning Tryon was in the breakfast-room at six o'clock. The servants were leaving the room as he entered it. He had not waited long when Georgie came in. She looked so bright and neat; her blue eyes so glad and her complexion so fresh that he felt his senses stir again in him as they had stirred more than once during the previous evening.

"Good morning, Mr. Tryon. You are down early. Has father appeared yet?"

"No, and I'm glad he hasn't," replied Tryon steadily, "for I've something to ask you first," he added, as their hands met. "Do you remember," he went on, "how kind you were to me when I was with you at school?"

Georgie tried to meet his eyes but could not. It was too sudden. Still she would have controlled even this faint testimony to her joy and satisfac-

tion had not a delicious feeling of pride in his directness and a certain shy longing to yield herself completely to his masterfulness made it impossible for her to do anything save try *by thinking of something else* to still the tumultuous beating of her heart while following his every word.

"Well, ever since that day you asked me about the sum, I've loved you, and now, Georgie, I want to know whether you care enough for me to be my wife?"

At the direct question, none of the romantic imaginings of her girlhood came into her head; on the contrary, her previous emotions even seemed to leave her. She regained self-possession at once and, looking him in the face, she answered,

"Yes."

As he put his arms round her and kissed her again and again, the tumultuous emotions came back to her with an added keenness of pleasure in being so embraced, which made it impossible for her at first to add anything to the simplicity of her avowal. But in a moment or two she disengaged herself. She felt afraid of herself—afraid lest these new, strong, delightful emotions might carry her further than she ought to go. She felt shy, too, and strove to hide her shyness under an affected confidence.

"Now," she said, with an added flush on her cheeks and brightness in her glance, "after having crumpled my frock and loosened my hair, and made me hot, perhaps you'll tell me was this the reason why papa wanted me to come down early?"

"One of the reasons, I think," said Tryon, smiling in response to her smile. "Didn't you guess it, Georgie?" and he put his hand on her shoulder as he spoke.

"Perhaps; but do you know you've altered a great deal; you're not like what you were—I mean you're—*older*, and I thought—"

"Then you did think of me sometimes, Georgie?"

The girl nodded her head with deep tenderness in her eyes. A need of frank confession was upon her, for her whole nature opened to this affection freely, as a flower to the sun's warmth.

"I just hated Europe and wanted that tour to end, for I was lonely often, and I thought perhaps you cared for me, though I wasn't sure you did so much—till last night. It is good to like some one, isn't it, and to be—liked?"

After this she did not seek to free herself, but suffered him to kiss her and to lead her to the sofa. The talk between them, made up of memories, and the questions and answers of a happy affection, seemed to have lasted but a minute when Mr. Boulger came into the room.

"That's right," he exclaimed joyfully, rubbing his hands, as the two stood up quickly as he came towards them, "that's right. I guess you've settled the main point already." But the part of happy father, difficult for Mr. Boulger to play at any time, was impossible without the help of even a word from either of the young people, and so, after a pause, he added more seriously and in almost his ordinary tone: "Now, Georgie,

you must let me take Dave away for a minute, as we've somethin' to settle first. We'll be back soon."

Without more ado he led Tryon into the drawing-room, and, taking a long white envelope from his breast-pocket as he went, he said hastily:

"Here's the note, Dave. You see I've filled in the sum as a hundred thousand. I've other girls, and—an' that was my first proposition. Wasn't it? You won't mind, I guess; you'll have ten or fifteen thousand dollars a year to live on, an' Georgie's a good girl an' not extravagant, an' you'll be better off anyway than any young pair in the town, an'——"

Tryon's real rapidity of judgment stood him in good stead on this occasion. He felt it was impossible for him to bargain at such a time, although the trick was palpable and irritated him. He saw at a glance, however, that nothing remained for him but to accept the situation. It was evidence of his rare adaptability that he also resolved to humour the cheat. Georgie's father was worth conciliating.

"All right," he replied slowly but with a smile. "I guess it's hard to trade with you and come out even. You're smart. There's no doubt about that."

The smile of self-satisfaction which spread over Mr. Boulger's face at what he accepted as a pleasant truth showed Tryon that he had said enough, so he broke off, and after looking over the paper carefully, he folded it up, and placing it again in the envelope, returned it.

"That makes you somethin' like my partner, you know, Dave," said Mr. Boulger conciliatingly, "and I mean to act fair by you always. I've every reason to now—but I'll be glad when it's all over. When do you think—but I guess we'll have time to talk of that after breakfast. Now, come."

On their return to the breakfast-room Mr. Boulger handed the envelope to Georgie.

"You're to keep that, Georgie, for three months." (The girl flushed.) "Then you're to give it to Dave, or, if I object, you're to open it and decide fairly between us. D'you understand? I guess we can both count on you—eh?"

"Yes," said the girl, knitting her brows and looking from her lover to her father. "At the end of three months I'm to give it to Mr. Tryon, unless you object, but if you do, I'm to open it and decide. It seems strange. Mayn't I know what's in this mysterious envelope?"

"Girls mustn't know too much at once," replied Mr. Boulger carelessly; "but now keep the paper safe, and let's have breakfast. I'm real hungry. An' I guess Dave 'll be able to eat a square meal, too. Happiness is a good sauce—eh?"

The breakfast was cheerful and pleasant. Mr. Boulger talked incessantly in a somewhat excited way, which left the young people to their thoughts and interchange of looks. Dave Tryon was more than satisfied with his success. Georgie seemed to him an ideal wife; and the girl herself would have been lost in her deep content had she not noticed anxiously that her lover now and then seemed very thoughtful.

III

The store was composed of four storeys, three of which were filled with goods. The staircase ran from close to Tryon's office, in the back part of the first floor, towards the front, and emerged on the fourth floor, dividing it into two almost equal halves. Here in a sort of attic lived a German with his wife, who, by way of rent, took care of the building, sweeping and dusting it out in the mornings and at night, airing it in summer, lighting the fires in winter, and so on. As soon as Tryon thought of getting in wood he remembered the Lenzes. He had always given Lenz the money for the wood and current expenses, and he had now to see him in order, if possible, to get Lenz to propose to buy a quantity of wood at once for cheapness' sake and to store it beneath the stairway. This was easily accomplished; a few words of praise induced the simple German to take upon himself the honour—and the responsibility—of having suggested this important purchase. So far so good. But Tryon understood that if he tried to get the Lenzes to leave the store on any pretence whatever, suspicion would at once attach to him. They must go out of their own accord, and he would have to take advantage of the opportunity which chance or their habits might offer. The worst of it was that he knew next to nothing of the Lenzes or of their way of living. They did their work so well that he had had but few occasions to speak to them, and the contempt which

Americans feel for all foreigners, and particularly for those who speak with a foreign accent, had hindered him from having any intercourse with them. Tryon realised that it would never do to question Lenz as to his habits and customs. These he must learn from others. So he began to frequent a German lager-bier saloon in the evenings and talk with the customers. This served another purpose. Tryon's rooted repugnance to fraud was stirred to activity chiefly by his mother; intercourse with her awakened all that was honest in him, and again and again led him to question his resolve. And this was very painful to him: hesitation being intolerable to men accustomed to action. Accordingly he soon became aware that his visits to the lager-bier saloon not only increased his knowledge of Germans and their ways, but also diminished the unconscious influence of his mother upon him, and so freed him from remorseful doubtings, which were hard to combat. He, therefore, kept up his visits to the saloon long after his primary object was accomplished, and he excused himself to his mother for the lateness of his homecomings by alleging the necessity for increased exertions in his new position. Mrs. Tryon accepted this excuse the more readily as her son had, of course, informed her that he was engaged to Georgie Boulger. In spite of Mrs. Tryon's natural jealousy, the girl's frankness had made a favourable impression upon her, and the two soon became as good friends as such a connection permits even between women who are both of kindly nature.

In his third or fourth visit to the saloon Tryon found out that the *Turn-Verein Fest*, a sort of annual festival, which all Germans of the middle and lower classes are accustomed to attend, would be held on the 1st of August (his visit to the Boulger's took place on the 10th July). A few evenings later he learned that Lenz and his wife were almost sure to be present, and as Lenz held some sort of subordinate office in the *Verein*, he would be kept at the festival till midnight or later. Tryon had, therefore, nothing to do but prepare everything, wait for the evening of the 1st, and then act. Methodically, according to his habit, he took the evenings in the saloon for thought, and during the day set himself to organise and develop the business with all his energy. That he knew would avert suspicion from him. Who could imagine that the energetic manager would set the building on fire wherein he worked with tireless devotion? And in the evenings spent in the saloon, while considering and reconsidering all the details of his plan, he was but little troubled by remorse or doubts. The unfamiliar faces in the saloon, and the strange speech, moved him to dislike and contempt; excited, indeed, his combative instincts while subduing his better nature. So the days passed, marked by no incident save an occasional sentence or two exchanged with Georgie when, from time to time, she, with her mother or sisters, visited the store. Mr. Boulger seldom went to business after Tryon's inauguration as manager; and, when he did go, the mere sight of Tryon's activity and resolution seemed to assure him that

his cause was in good hands. It was characteristic of Tryon, and of his opinion of Mr. Boulger that he never told his employer when or how he intended to effect their purpose. Somehow or other Tryon felt sure that if Mr. Boulger knew the moment, he would "fuss" and perhaps excite suspicion; besides, as he had undertaken to do the thing, he wished to do it in his own way, taking all the responsibility upon his own shoulders. He felt stronger alone than with any associate.

At length the 1st of August dawned. A cloudless, hot day even when Tryon awoke at half-past five. There was wind, too, a moderate breeze from the north-east, of all winds the most favourable to his design. He couldn't help smiling as the proverb came into his head, "It's an ill wind——." He felt proud of himself; as the trial came near he was neither elated nor depressed. As usual he talked quietly with his mother over his breakfast and then walked to the store. All the day through he worked as usual, perhaps with a slight increase of energy, but with all his wits about him. Towards six o'clock he happened to be standing just outside his office when the Lenzes, dressed in their best clothes, came down the stairs towards him. The shop was filled with customers availing themselves of the comparative coolness of the evening to make their purchases. No one of the clerks had time to notice the outgoing couple or the short conversation which took place between Lenz and Tryon.

"Going out, Mr. Lenz?" asked Tryon carelessly.

"Yes, sir, but we come back before twelve hour and den I set everytink in order."

The man appeared to have more to say; but Tryon turned away smiling, and Mrs. Lenz drew her spouse towards the back door. With their departure Tryon felt that his last anxiety was lifted. An hour or so later he sat in his office alone. In half an hour more he had posted his books in his usual, firm, clear hand. It was still quite light. He went up the staircase looking round each room as he went. When he reached the third floor he walked to one of the front windows and threw it up. By an instinct of carefulness when he returned to the staircase he went up the narrow stairs which were unprotected by a hand-rail, to the fourth floor and looked round the bare attic. On his right stood a wooden partition which cut off the Lenzes' abode from the rest of the huge space; he saw their door; it was closed. Of course, he thought, they've locked it till their return. He went down the stairs again and stopped before the petroleum cask which stood in the corner formed by his office; it was covered from view by a piece of cloth (damaged goods), which lay on it half unrolled. In the short interval which had elapsed since he had ascended the stairs, it had grown dark. By moving a step or two, however, he could still see to the top of the flight, but while he looked the shadows came and shrouded everything in night and mystery. He needed no light. He knew it was about nine o'clock and that was the hour he had fixed upon as most favourable to his purpose—a little earlier and business people

were still about, a little later and the frequenters of saloons and bars would be on their homeward way. His fire had a clear hour or so in which to do its work; less than half that time he had decided would be more than sufficient. Quietly he moved to the back-door, drew aside the green curtain and peered out over the empty lot. Nothing stirred. He could just see dimly across the lane to the backs of the houses which fronted north on Jackson Street; their outlines cast shadows against the sky. Nothing stirred. He dropped the curtain and returned to the cask of petroleum; he didn't even lift up the cloth which covered it; he put his hand down underneath it and—turned the tap. He had studied the floor carefully weeks ago; he knew that the number of people passing up and down the staircase must have depressed the floor there. He heard nothing but the glug, glug, glug, of the running oil, which seemed to keep time to the strong thumping of his heart. A few moments and the glug, glug grew slower and then silence reigned again. He had drawn a step or two backwards just to make sure that none of the oil spreading should come on his boots.

Now he struck a wax-match, and looked. Everything had taken place just as he had planned it. The petroleum had run from the corner, and now lay in a broad pool at the foot of the stairs, spreading two, oily, dark arms around it as if to embrace its prey. Just on the edge of the pool stood his basket of waste-paper, and reaching from the basket to the dry floor a long horn of paper. For a moment Tryon paused, but only

for a moment: then he stepped forward and put the match to the end of the paper-horn. As the paper caught fire he turned and walked quickly to the back-door. He opened it and looked out for a minute or so while he unlocked the outside iron grating: nothing stirred. He entered the store again, and, holding the door nearly shut in his hand, he put his foot against the large pane of glass and pressed steadily. Suddenly it broke under the pressure and fell jingling. Nothing stirred, and yet he uttered an exclamation to deceive a possible listener. People later, would think the glass was broken by the heat. It was worth risking to create a thorough draught. One glance backward showed him the thick horn of paper blazing. Quickly he stepped outside and shut the door. As he put the key in the lock he heard above its grating a sort of hissing noise. He peered about him. Nothing stirred; silence and darkness enfolded him. Standing in front of the broken window, he put his hand carefully through and drew a small piece of the curtain aside, then, stooping, he looked in. At once he let the curtain go, and, turning, passed through the iron grating, which he locked. As he went to the lane and walked down it he felt a glow of heat on his back—fancy, of course; but it wasn't fancy the great flame which had shocked his eyes a moment ago, and which still seemed to blind him. It wasn't fancy either that crackling noise of dry wood blazing. But he hadn't gone fifty yards down the lane before the breathless excitement left him, giving place to a feeling of satisfaction. He had done

his work well, as he always did, and if nothing stirred and no one had seen him, that was only what experience had taught him to expect. As he walked rapidly towards the German saloon his satisfaction grew almost to exultation. He had foreseen everything; planned everything rightly, even to the draught, and now the wood under the staircase was blazing, and the staircase itself a tunnel of flame. Half an hour and Boulger's store would be afire so that no engines could extinguish the flames till the floors fell in, leaving the blackened walls to be gazed at by a crowd, as when Treadwell's burned down in the winter. And no one had seen him; he knew beforehand that it was a hundred chances to one that no one would, and with the long odds went success—Georgie and money, and a full, strong life of successful labour. That was the difference between men like himself and criminals. Those who committed crimes, as a rule, were degraded and debased specimens of humanity, who had neither foresight nor coolness. He had both, therefore everything went well with him. With these thoughts and in the mood they indicate, he reached the saloon. It was nearly empty; he took his usual seat and called for a glass of lager-bier. Instinctively when in the light he looked at his right foot—no, neither the oil nor the glass had marked it; he was too cool, had taken too much care to make any slightest mistake. As the *Kellner* brought him his beer Tryon watched to see if the man noticed anything unusual in his appearance or manner. No; with a "Goot evenin'!" the man put the glass before him,

and turned away indifferently. Reassured, Tryon set himself to consider once again, as he had often considered in the last few days, the question whether any one could connect him with the fire? No—no one. Suspicion there might be. It was to Boulger's interest that the store should be burned; the insurance was very heavy, and therefore he, or some one moved by him, might have done the work, but then Boulger's name was good, and of proof or of connecting link there wasn't a trace.

It was characteristic of Tryon that his feeling of complete security should awaken remorse in him.

"'Twas a miserable thing to have done after all —a mean fraud. Theft," he faced the word, "theft. What a fool Boulger had been; what a vain, weak—— Now, there was nothing for it but to get to work. If Boulger played fair and made him a partner, he might yet get rich enough to make up for the fraud. He didn't want to steal; there was no dishonest instinct in him, he felt proudly. He knew what he could make of the business; with half the stock it should bring in at least a hundred thousand dollars profit the first year, and more in every succeeding year. Then if he got rich he'd pay the money back in some way—pay it to the poor; they needed it more than the rich insurance companies. But he'd see that they got something, too. The new store would, of course, be fireproof; he'd insure it for more than the proper amount, for more than it was insured at before, and he'd not carry half the

stock. So the insurance companies would get some of their money back, anyway. There'd be no more fires while Dave Tryon was manager; he'd take care of that."

Here his reflections broke off in a chill of anxiety.

"If the fire hadn't caught, had burned out in spite of all his care. Absurd. It had caught—it must have. He had done his work too well to be afraid of that. But if it had caught, some one should have seen it ere this. No. 'Twas better that no one should notice it for at least half an hour, and he hadn't been sitting down ten minutes yet.

"Suppose some one noticed it now—now! and gave the alarm. It might be put out, and all his work lost and hopes gone." Mechanically he took out his handkerchief and wiped the cold perspiration from his forehead. For the first time in his life he took up the glass and drank the beer. Usually he spilled some of it and left the rest. In a moment again his throat was parched; but he wouldn't drink any more; the *Kellner* might remark it, if he asked for a second glass.

Every moment that passed made his position better. "'Twould be all right." And so he sat and waited, outwardly calm; but every minute seemed an hour to him, till he ventured to look at his watch, and saw that it was half-past nine. Then relief came for a time.

"'Twas all right now; the traces of his work had all been destroyed by this time, swallowed up by the flames. Poor work it was—mighty poor."

For ten minutes or a quarter of an hour this thought was with him in all its bitterness; then the old doubts came to him again.

"Perhaps it hadn't caught, after all!—hadn't got to the piled-up wood. Some one would surely have noticed it by now if it had really caught, as he intended it should. But, no! That hour was the quietest in the whole day. Besides the front door was so protected; till the second storey was blazing no one could see anything. But as the minutes passed the doubt grew stronger and stronger. In spite of his resolution and courage his feverish anxiety made it almost impossible for him to sit quietly there and wait while the precious minutes flew. Weeks ago, he had made up his mind to go back to the store at half-past ten, if the alarm had not been given before, and in case the fire had burnt out, to do his best to hide his handiwork. And it was already quarter past ten; his face seemed to grow harder and thinner as he thought that, after all, it was possible that his labour and care had been vain.

Of a sudden his eager senses became aware of a stir in the distance; he listened, and could hear nothing. Yet again, and far away the air seemed to be stirred with sound, though he could distinguish nothing. He looked about him; no one seemed to have noticed anything unusual. Yet he was sure, and his heart and temples throbbed tumultuously. There! Distinctly he heard running footsteps pass the corner hastening up Lee Street. Would those dolts never hear, and so give him the chance of flying to the scene of action? There!

and again the hurrying footsteps and the vibrant, living air with its eager message seemed to draw nearer and nearer, and past the door of the saloon went one racing. At last the Germans seemed to become conscious that something unusual was afoot.

As the *Kellner* stopped on his way to an open-mouthed customer and looked towards the door, which hurrying footsteps were again passing, Tryon rose quietly and walked to the bar. As he laid down his quarter he said to the proprietor:

"I guess there's something the matter."

He was proud of the fact that his voice was as quiet and even as usual, though the beatings of his heart seemed to shake his chest. As the man turned towards him, the brazen voice of the alarm-bell shocked the air. With the first note Tryon was in the street; he had felt that all had risen to the warning, and that he was free to act. What a relief it was to run lightly along the bending wooden sidewalk to the corner. No more restraint needed; he could have shouted with the mere delight of freedom and excitement. As he turned into Lee Street he found himself beside another man who was racing, his breath coming in short, laboured gasps.

"Where is it?" cried Tryon to him.

"Don't know."

Then others were beside him, and soon among the knot running some one said:

"It's Boulger's."

"What!" exclaimed Tryon, as if horrified, and at once sped away from them.

As he stopped in front of the building he found himself in a group of some thirty or forty men and boys, who were all gazing up at the ominous red gleam in the window of the second storey. Thick smoke was issuing from the window on the third floor, and in spite of the darkness of the night could be seen against the sky, whirling away in black wisps of rack. At the same moment Tryon became aware of a noise within the building which was at once crackle and hiss and muffled roar, the sound which once heard is never afterwards mistaken for any other—the voice of a great fire with its chords of menace and rage and triumph.

"What's to be done?" he cried, pushing his way towards the great entrance. "I've the keys."

"Nothin', I guess," some one answered, "here's the engine."

Down the street it came, like a thing alive, the horses galloping, the men shouting, and drew up before the door. As the firemen, with an astonishing celerity, got to work, each man in his place, opening the main, attaching the hose-pipe, etc., with the practical genius characteristic of the race, and which is always seen at its best when the need of action is greatest, Tryon stepped to the side of the chief—"I've the keys. Shall I open the door?"

"No, 'twould make a draught," came the quick answer; "we'll have to get to work through the second storey, though I'm afraid we're too late."

The man had hardly finished speaking when there came a loud crash and the noise of breaking

glass, and then the flames, leaping from their confinement out into the air through the second storey casements, lit up great clouds of dust which rose from the quivering building, and the faces of the firemen and those of the crowd of people who filled the further side-walk, revealing every incident of the scene in one glare of yellow-red light. Then the flames drew in again as a man draws breath for a further effort.

"By God! The first floor's gone; the place'll fall in before we get three engines to work. Clear the side-walks there! Fifty yards from the engine. Stand back!"

As the order was given the crowd fell back quietly, drawing Tryon with them. In a whirl of emotions and sensations not to be analyzed then or afterwards, Tryon stood among his fellows while a ladder was reared against the building, and a fireman climbed it and began to play through the shattered windows of the second storey. He saw the flames leap out against the stream of water as if in combat; he heard men about him saying that in an hour the building would fall in; he was conscious that a second engine had come to aid the first, and a little later that a third had arrived, but thought was whelmed in feeling. He realised that all efforts were in vain, that nothing could check the fire, that his work was done—completely. And then remorse came upon him; at first with a vague sense of loss, such as one feels in missing the familiar and accustomed; later, with the full understanding of waste and destruction, as acutely keen regret. Suddenly the feeling

ebbed, leaving him conscious of utter weariness; instinctively he changed his posture and began to look about him. He was on the edge of the side-walk, about twenty yards below the circle wherein stood the three engines, with the firemen moving about automatically in the strong light which poured from the windows of the second storey. Far away up and down the street the crowd stretched into the darkness. With clear brain now he took in all the details of the scene. Two streams of water rose from the street like silver serpents, bent in an arc which ended hissing among the flames from the casements: the third, directed by a fireman standing on a ladder at the height of the second storey, but a little way from the window, ran out from the pipe in a long arrow which, now here, now there, gleamed like a ray of moonlight. Tryon's heart lay heavy within him as he took in the progress of the ruin he had wrought. "Never again," he muttered to himself, "never again."

All at once came the sharp noise of glass breaking on the side-walk, and then from the height above the fireman on the ladder, from a window of the fourth storey a cry—a shrill child's voice shrieking in terror—and as Tryon looked up he saw two thin arms waving and a little black head which suddenly disappeared. Speechless, with a dread he would not acknowledge and was afraid to understand, he stood at gaze.

"Whose is the child?"

They were asking him! How should he know? He could do nothing but look his horror. "A

little nigger. A coloured girl. 'Bout twelve years old;" the hurried exclamations fluttered; then all eyes turned again to the burning building. Mechanically Tryon's followed. Three serpents instead of two now curved from the street to the windows. Four of five men were moving the ladder a little more to the left, and then came a groan of disappointment as it was seen that the ladder only just reached to the window of the third floor. Quickly a fireman ran up it and disappeared through the window; the crowd surged forward, carrying Tryon with it. The movement seemed to give him conscious thought.

"Not fire then—not theft. Murder!" The child must have been employed by the Lenzes. The man's hesitation came back to him. He understood it all at once. His previous remorse intensified to horror. And in his horror came strangely the thought of his mother, nerving him to action. "No, that mustn't be, sha'n't be," he said to himself; "not that! not that!"

With the resolution the blood came back into his veins in quick thrills. Just at this moment he saw the fireman appear again at the window on the third storey, with a gesture as of regret. As the man climbed over the sill and began to descend the ladder, Tryon with all his senses about him, tore himself through the crowd as a bramble is torn from a garment. As the firemen pushed him back from the foot of the ladder, he said simply, "I know the way." They pointed to the man descending and he waited a moment quietly. He was not one of those who act bravely on an im-

pulse; he needed thought and time for decision, but once his resolution taken he was sure to carry it out undeterred by fear of danger. As the fireman put his foot on the ground, Tryon began to mount the ladder—slowly, for the work was new to him—carefully, for he didn't mean to fall. As he went up, rung by rung, more and more surely and quickly, stern joy came to him.

"This was the way. So he'd blot out his fault."

Such was his thought till he found himself on the third floor moving towards the ladder staircase. He had gone perhaps half the way when he felt himself choking with the smoke; his eyes, too, were burning; he closed them and held his breath and went on quickly. A dozen steps and he opened his eyes again. Before him to his left was the staircase, a round furnace mouth of flame eating away at the ladder which led to the fourth floor; it scorched his face; unconsciously he drew breath and was nearly choked with the thick smoke. One quick glance and he turned and ran back to the window.

The fireman had followed him up. Tryon thrust his head past him into the air and drew two or three long, cool breaths. The fireman said, "It's no use. No one can do it." Tryon filled his lungs to the uttermost and turning with eyes shut ran down the store. He had judged the distance in his mind. Of a sudden he stopped and opening his eyes found himself almost where he had been before. Measuring the space with his eye he took two quick steps—and jumped. He landed on the ladder and scrambled up it. As he came

to the top he fell forward on his face on the fourth floor. He could still breathe there. Instinctively he rubbed his legs together to put out the fire which had caught his trousers and was burning him. Then he called out, "Where are you?" No answer. He ran to a window and smashed it with his fist in a sort of vague hope to get light and air. Again and again he called as he went along the front wall feeling sure the child would be there. Suddenly he saw her crouching in the farthest corner. He picked her up at once and ran as well as he could towards the ladder. As he put his foot on the first step, she began to scream and struggle. No wonder: it seemed to her as if they were going into the heart of the furnace which was roaring beneath them. Tryon held her firmly and went down a few steps carefully to get beneath the floor. The heat was too frightful; he could go no further. As he turned on the ladder he felt almost sure that he couldn't jump beyond the flames. But there was nothing else to be done. Holding the child tightly to him with his left arm, he sprang out with desperate effort.

So far he was fully conscious and sensible. But in his determination to protect the child, he had jumped in such a way that if he fell his right arm would sustain the shock. As he landed on the floor and pitched forward just clear of the flames, his right arm snapped under his weight. His consciousness seemed to turn to sick agony. He rolled over on his back, and he had to push with the broken arm to regain his balance and rise to

his feet. Each time, too, he put his right foot to the ground, he grew faint. How he got forward, he never knew. But the will in him held, sharpened now by a dread which was all instinctive. Of a sudden as it seemed to him, he reached the window; he saw the fireman's hand on the sill; he pushed the child against it. In an instant the fireman had taken the child, lifted her over the sill and disappeared with her down the ladder. With the removal of his burden, Tryon seemed to lose his purpose and almost his senses. A sick faintness came over him and he sank down against the sill without strength sufficient to put his leg over it, much less to descend the ladder. His force was spent. But the fresh air revived him a little, and the intense pain of his wrist rousing him to a sense of danger, moved him to a last effort. Slowly and with infinite pain he got his right leg over the sill, and so lay astride upon it, half unconscious, incapable of movement. But the crowd below, much more interested in him than in the saved child, shouted to the firemen, two of whom, realising his state, ran up the ladder almost side by side. Just as the foremost reached him, there came another crash, and, as the third floor fell in, the imprisoned flames sprang up round Tryon, as if reluctant to lose their prey. For a moment the crowd saw him in the heart of the fire, and then he was dragged down on to the ladder and held in front of the firemen, who began to descend slowly, letting the unconscious body slide after them. As he passed the light of the second storey it appeared to everyone in the crowd that Tryon was dead. So limp he

lay and helpless, with the right hand bent back, like a broken stick which hangs only by the bark.

As the men reached the ground and bore him across the street and laid him on the pavement not a sound was to be heard, save the hysterical sobbing of the negro-girl. A few moments passed, moments of intense anxiety to thousands who didn't even know Tryon's name, and then as the doctor stood up with, "I think he'll bear carrying," a wave of joy went through the crowd, and tears came into many eyes unused to weeping. Stretched on a mattrass he was borne still unconscious to his mother's house. The crowd followed quietly; the interest in the fire was lost in this deeper interest. As the doctor reached the door just before the bearers, it was opened to him by Mrs. Tryon.

In a few hasty words he told her of her son's daring, and assured her that he thought he would pull through. The mother took the sentence without flinching, and candle in hand showed the way into her own bedroom on the ground floor. As the bearers emerged from the house and closed the street-door after them, the crowd began to move away. It occurred to them at last that the night was far advanced. But still they went in groups talking and discussing the story.

"Jack Whatman said it couldn't be done. The smoke was awful. . . . All for a nigger-girl. I'll just be damned. He has sand in him. . . . But why did *he* go? Not I for a nigger. . . . He's broke his arm. And leg! Did ye hear the nigger cryin'? I guess he was more worth'n a pile of nigger girls. . . . The doctor thinks he'll live.

He'll never be as good a man again. Never! . . . What'll Boulger say? What'll he do? He's insured, I guess. You bet. He ain't no fool. The nigger might have burned for him. He'll get the greenbacks. . . . Who d'ye think will be manager now? "

IV

Mr. Boulger drove into Kansas City very early the morning after the fire so as to catch Tryon alone before the store opened; he had a difficult and unpleasant task to perform. It was manifest to him that Tryon, in spite of his resolute manner, was " lettin' things slide." He had gone to business again and again with the intention of pressing Tryon to immediate action, but somehow or other he felt it impossible even to approach the subject when he came face to face with his strong manager. Yet, since their compact had been settled he had never entered the store with any other object. And this for a good reason. He knew that Tryon had taken control of the business as master; he felt that his presence in the store under these circumstances would be a tacit recognition of Tryon's position and authority, and that it would be difficult for him later to turn the whilom manager into a subordinate. Accordingly, he had determined not to go to the store till *afterwards*, when he could at once show Tryon his true position. Tryon, he felt, was altogether too masterful, and besides, he was young and inexperienced. In fact, it was almost impossible for Mr. Boulger

to contemplate any one as manager of the business which he flattered himself he and he alone understood in all its bearings. Tryon's astonishing knowledge of the business in its details and possible development was a perpetual annoyance to his employer. Mr. Boulger liked to ask questions which no one could answer; it showed his superior intelligence. But Tryon had an answer to all relevant questions, and he simply did not hear irrelevant ones. His knowledge was insulting. Then, too, Mr. Boulger liked to make suggestions, to propose new schemes by which the business might be developed. And Tryon had either put these schemes into operation already or else was prepared to demonstrate their impracticability. He was always so d——d conceited. And this conceit enraged Mr. Boulger. Again and again he had made up his mind not to go near the store till— But yes, he'd just look in for a moment and ask carelessly, "Well, Dave, is everything goin' on all right?" No one but Tryon could understand that. And a word in reply would be sufficient. That was all he wanted—to know the thing was movin'. But 'twas impossible to ask the question. There was Tryon directing, managing everything, pretending to be very busy, scarcely vouchsafing a word to him, who, after all, was not only the owner, but knew more of the business than any one else could possibly know. 'Twas exasperatin', and he didn't intend to put up with such treatment any longer.

For all the while Tryon was just tradin' on his generosity. 'Twas all very well for him to play

manager and take five thousand dollars a year; to talk and whisper to Georgie as if he were already her husband; but what had he done for it all? Nothin'. Nothin' as yet anyway. And perhaps —perhaps he didn't mean to do anythin'? Who could tell? Mr. Boulger grew cold with fear at the thought, and then viciously angry. He'd put down his foot. He wasn't to be fooled easily; he knew a thing or two; he could play a game as well as the next man. Damn him! He'd show him that kindness, generosity, yes, generosity, didn't mean foolishness—wasn't to be played with. And so this very morning he told Georgie that she was altogether too free with Tryon. She shouldn't talk to him in the store. It didn't look well. She was treating him as if he were her husband, and those daily visits to his mother were out of place —altogether out of place.

The girl had regarded him with astonishment, and her astonishment brought him to a standstill. He saw he had gone too far.

Of course, he thought a pile of Tryon. Tryon was hard working, and 'twould all come right with time, he guessed; but there was no use in goin' too fast. Girls shouldn't go too fast; 'twarn't their place, and so forth—the reproaches dying away into weak generalities.

But the consciousness of this impotent conclusion only exasperated him the more with Tryon. "Was he or was he not goin' to do the work? And if so, when?" These were the questions to which Mr. Boulger resolved to get an immediate answer, and as he drove into the city he made up

his mind that he would grasp the thistle firmly. He wouldn't give Tryon any more time; he had *given* more than enough already. Besides, time was everythin' in this matter. That bill of Stewart's pressed, and Tryon knew about it. 'Twas too bad of Tryon to keep him in such anxiety. 'Twarn't fair of him. No, he'd have an answer at last. He'd insist on having one.

Immersed in such reflections as these, Mr. Boulger reached Lee Street. Owing partly to the earliness of the hour, and partly to his own preoccupation, he had almost reached the store before noticing anything unusual. But as he turned into Lee Street at the very block whereon his house of business stood, he banished thought and looked about him. The street seemed crowded; people had come to business earlier than usual. What was that? Impulsively he drew the reins tight, and his trotter's speed quickened to racing pace. In another minute, with white face and trembling lips, he was in front of the blackened four walls, from which smoke was still issuing—the walls which but yesterday had been his store. Paralyzed with amazement and fear he sat in the buggy staring. The surprise stood him in good stead.

"Why, Mr. Boulger, you look astonished?" The sarcastic interrogation came from the agent of a New York Insurance Company, which stood to pay Mr. Boulger a hundred thousand dollars—if, indeed, the fire was an accident. The agent, a young and able man who commanded the respect of his colleagues, had a very strong suspicion that this fire, so extraordinary in its completeness, was

not due to mere chance; but when he saw turned upon him Mr. Boulger's white face, trembling lips and vacant stare of wonder, all his doubts disappeared. This man evidently knew nothing of the catastrophe, and as he was the only party interested—Mr. Jenkins at once changed his tone.

"Hadn't you heard the news?"

"When—?" The interrogation caused Mr. Boulger a gulp.

"Between nine and ten last night. 'Twas all over by twelve, before that German and his wife got back from their doggoned festival. I guess he had left somethin' burnin'. But hain't you heard of Tryon, your manager? Every one's talkin' of him."

Mr. Boulger shook his head; fear seized him. What about Tryon? For the life of him he couldn't have uttered a word. Then, as the crowd gathered about his buggy, Mr. Boulger heard the whole story. As he listened to the curt phrases which seemed to sharpen the edges of the tragedy and to lend weight to the praise of Tryon's conduct, Mr. Boulger's muscles relaxed, and his face gradually regained its colour and ordinary expression. What should he say? He felt that Jenkins was takin' him in and postin' him up. The enthusiasm with which the crowd listened to the meagre statement of what Tryon had done, gave Mr. Boulger his cue.

"Well, the fire's bad enough for me, but I'd lose twice as much to know that Tryon was out of danger." With the actor's instinct, which is inseparable from vanity, he saw from the faces of the

people that he had struck the right note, and so he went on. "Why, he's engaged to my daughter! I must go right off and see him. What'll—" From a dozen men came words of approval and sympathy. Mr. Boulger glowed with pleasure; he felt at ease again, but his inventive faculty was neither facile nor profound.

"Georgie'll want to know whether there's any hope. I—" The chord seemed false, not equal to the diapason of popular sympathy and reverence. Mr. Boulger felt that he had made a mistake, but having to say something, struck the right key immediately, with—

"I'll fetch my daughter: she'll do him good, I guess." Again the murmur of approval; and forthwith he drove rapidly up the street homewards. Again his impressionable nature had served him better than any calculation could have done. As Mr. Boulger turned and drove away without even a word to him, Jenkins, the insurance agent, felt his last doubts removed. Clearly Boulger knew nothing of the tragedy and feared no investigation; he wasn't conciliatory, not polite even. So Mr. Jenkins set himself to think how he could turn this knowledge to account. Utterly unconscious of the effect he had produced, or of its importance, Mr. Boulger drove on in a whirl of emotions and thoughts.

He was glad. Yes. The store was burned clean out; the insurance money was safe; he was all right; Stewart's bill all right too; but what did it all mean? Tryon wounded and badly burnt was to him a source of dread. What mightn't

happen? He might be delirious; might begin to talk; might—God, what bad luck!

"He might die—without speakin'." Mr. Boulger felt a warm thrill of pleasure run through him at the thought. "But nothin' ever turns out quite right—nothin'. Still he might. Who knows? The men seemed to say he was very bad."

With the feeling that Tryon was pretty sure to die, Mr. Boulger was conscious of a certain pity and almost affection for him. "Poor devil, it's hard on him; he did the thing well;" but as the thought came again that perhaps Tryon might "let out" something instead of dying quietly, the pity gave place in Mr. Boulger to a sort of surprised indignation not unmixed with contempt.

"What did he want tryin' to save a nigger girl? Why didn't he go quietly home and let the store burn? 'Twas foolish goin' back. And then to try what the fireman said was impossible. That was just like him; he always knew better than any one else: he'd never take good advice—he deserved what he had got."

Mr. Boulger thought with warm self-satisfaction how differently he'd have acted had he been in Tryon's place. He'd have just gone in at the window, as the fireman did, and then come out again; that would have looked well, and would have cost nothin'. No. Tryon wasn't really smart—he wasn't; he was rather stupid; hard-working, yes, but slow—dull, that was the word, dull.

"Would he die? That was the point."

And how would Georgie take it? She'd get on

her high horse, he felt, and play the fool; girls always did; they hadn't any sense. Mr. Boulger realised with a sting of keen annoyance that he could do nothing to restrain his daughter. Tryon, he felt, had got into favour with the people and—yes, that was a good thing for him, too. The insurance companies would make no fuss about payin'. Well, so far, at any rate, it had gone all right, and if Tryon had got hurt, 'twas his own fault; and if Georgie acted foolish, that was her business. After all, he couldn't force her to be sensible.

With such thoughts as these in his mind, Mr. Boulger drew up at his own door. As he gave the reins to a negro boy, and thought of what he should say to Georgie, the popular feeling came back to him in all its strength, and he resolved to act as if he admired Tryon. And he did admire him: very few would have done what he did, and if 'twas foolish, well, after all, so far it had done no harm—rather the contrary, in fact.

As he entered the sitting-room, Georgie came to meet him, startled by his quick return and by the unwonted seriousness of his manner. Scarcely had he begun his story, when she interrupted him:

"And Mr. Tryon? Is he—?" and she flushed crimson.

In spite of himself, he answered her excitement with direct narration. As soon as he had finished the story she left the room hurriedly. But Mr. Boulger went on talking; Tryon's heroism impressed him while he described it; he thought it wise, too, to add that though he was insured, yet,

of course, he'd have to lose something. 'Twould take three or four months, workin' night and day, to rebuild the store; and, as Tryon was in bed, he'd have to direct everythin' himself. But then 'twould be better done. So p'r'aps 'twas just as well. His women-folk didn't receive his self-gratulation as sympathetically as usual, and this made Mr. Boulger feel ill at ease. In truth, they were more moved than they cared to show. Ada felt sorry that she had treated Tryon with contempt; perhaps, she thought, if she had encouraged him a little——. Ivy regretted that she had yielded the place so quickly to Georgie, and thought Georgie ought to be very grateful to her, still——. Mrs. Boulger condescended to say that the young man had acted very well—" 'twas a pity he had had no advantages." Then Georgie came into the room dressed to go out. "Let's go, father," she said, and at once Mr. Boulger yielded. He felt 'twould look well to take her in without loss of time; 'twould be the right thing to do; only——

On their way into town the girl drew from him the whole story over again. And Mr. Boulger felt it to be impossible to warn her, as he had meant to do. Her seriousness kept him at bay. She shivered as she passed the store. The smoke rising from the roofless building, the height of the third storey, appalled her. And the glimpse of blue sky she caught through the blackened windows chilled her with apprehension. She almost took it as an omen.

They had been in the front room but a moment or two when Mrs. Tryon came in. She was calm,

but very pale. Impulsively Georgie took a step or two towards her, and then, stopping, burst into tears. The mother's strong, silent grief frightened her. But Mr. Boulger said:

"Mrs. Tryon, we've come to ask after Dave; we hope he's not much hurt. And if we could do anything for him, we——"

"He's very ill," Mrs. Tryon spoke quietly, "and I mustn't leave him long. The doctor says he may be—lame for life, even if he ever recovers. And his arm's broken, too. But I feel he'll get well; he must get well. He's not conscious sometimes, but he lies quite still and never complains. My boy! The doctor says everybody is talking of him," and the mother's lip quivered. "But now I must go to him; I hear him stirring," and she passed noiselessly into the sick-room.

Mr. Boulger was so relieved to know that Tryon lay quite still that he felt almost grateful to him, and forgave Georgie her tears. In a few moments Mrs. Tryon returned.

"He wants to see you," she said to Georgie coldly; "but you must take care and not excite him. The doctor said that would be bad for him; and you mustn't cry nor make a noise." As the girl turned towards her a tear-wet face, the large-hearted woman added more sympathetically, "There, it'll be all right, I guess. There! dry your eyes and come; it'll do him good to see you." What it cost her to add the last phrase, only a woman can understand.

With a great effort Georgie dried her eyes and disappeared into the room after Mrs. Tryon. The

colloquy didn't last long. In ten minutes she was again in the buggy with her father.

"Well, what did he say?"

"He—he only asked me to read the letter if—if he died." Georgie's eyes filled as she spoke. "He looked terrible—all black; his mother says that'll go off, but oh, I hope his eyebrows will grow again. And he's so weak. Father, do you think he'll ever get well? He could scarcely speak; he just lay and looked at us, and whispered. Oh, I hope—I hope he won't die," and again Georgie burst into tears. The catastrophe had not upset her as much as Mrs. Tryon's strong self-repression which she felt was born of dread.

"He'll get well, I guess," replied Mr. Boulger, to soothe her. "In a month he'll be up and about again; but, Georgie, remember you weren't to open that letter unless we both wanted you to. He can't alter that now. 'Twouldn't be right, would it?"

"Oh, father!" the girl cried reproachfully, "I must do what he asked me. I said I would."

"Well," replied Mr. Boulger, "we'll have time to think over that." His resignation came from the sudden reflection that if Georgie insisted upon opening the letter he'd tell her that his promise to pay Tryon a hundred thousand dollars was given on condition that they were married—as a wedding-present, in fact.

V

About six weeks later Tryon and his bride were seated side by side near the open window in the sitting-room of his mother's house. Half reclining in an easy chair with his right arm in a sling, he looked anything but strong. Yet though his face was thin and drawn, the eyes were bright and a spot of colour on the cheeks made him appear better than he was. He was excited a little by the thought that this was the day fixed for the presentation by the mayor and chief dignitaries of the city of the cheque for five thousand dollars which had been collected for him. Tryon felt no incongruity in this testimonial of respect and admiration. His direct and practical nature had from the beginning looked upon the saving of the girl as atonement for setting fire to the store. Whenever he thought of that night, and he thought of it but seldom, for his sufferings and slow convalescence had removed it into the far past, it seemed to him that he had been punished more than sufficiently. It was the future which occupied his mind.

Even on this occasion the lovers' talk was of the new store, for Georgie's tenderness excited by admiration took interest for the time being only in what interested her lover.

"Father says everything shall be done as you wish, and the side-door you wanted near the front-entrance is already half made. It looks so small and cute. The foreman told me the building goes up three feet in every twenty-four hours, and

there's not a store east of the Mississippi river as strongly built. He says it'll be quite fire-proof," and the girl shivered as she spoke.

"It'll be finished then in twenty days more," said Tryon thoughtfully, "and all roofed in about the time we're married; then we'll go and see it, won't we? I want to arrange everything inside myself. We must have show-room enough. When goods are crowded, nothin' looks well. I wish 'twas the twenty-fourth of September to-day; don't you, Georgie?" And he kissed her as he spoke. The girl nodded her head, smiling with eyes wide open, in tender joy and gladness.

At this moment the door opened and Mrs. Tryon came in, followed by Mr. Boulger. Mrs. Tryon had regained her usual cheerful manner. Mr. Boulger seemed handsomer than ever. Clearly prosperity agreed with him. The truth was that the public feeling for Tryon had carried him away on its strong tide. It was impossible to his vanity to be left out of the flow of expansive good feeling. And he had thought of a means of playing a conspicuous part in the honour about to be paid to Tryon.

"Dave," he said cheerfully smiling. "I congratulate you. Now you've got into this room, you'll soon be allowed out and then, then," he said, laying his hand on his daughter's head, "you'll soon get into the church, eh? And you deserve it all. There's no question about that. But now before the Mayor and Committee come, I want a word with you alone, and Mrs. Tryon declares you'll be able to bear it. Eh, Mrs. Tryon?"

The mother smiled pleasantly, and taking Georgie's arm left the room.

"Dave, it's just this. The insurance money has all been paid, every cent. 'Twas Jenkins started it: he got a good advertisement by bein' the first. 'The Banner' just whooped it right along, talked of his business energy, and all the other agents followed suit when the preachers began gettin' up the subscription for you. The money's all in the bank now, and if it hadn't been for you I'd have left it there. I've worked long enough, but you want your turn, and so the store's bein' rebuilt. That'll cost a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, with fittings complete. Fifty thousand dollars must stand for current expenses, and I think four hundred thousand dollars 'll be enough for stock. Six hundred thousand dollars in all. Now what do you say? I propose to put in the six hundred thousand and take you in as partner to the extent of a fourth share for the note which Georgie has. I say a fourth instead of a fifth so as to make up for your salary as manager. I guess that's fair, ain't it?" (Tryon nodded.) "Well, I've had the deeds of partnership drawn out to be signed on your marriage with Georgie, and I thought if you were agreed I'd just announce the fact to-day. 'Twouldn't look well if I was the only person to do nothin' on such a day to show my appreciation of you. I guess Boulger, Tryon and Co. will do over the entrance, eh?" And Mr. Boulger's face shone with the consciousness of kindly generosity.

For all answer Tryon held out his left hand with

a smile of acceptance. To him the proposition seemed highly advantageous; he knew what he could do with the business, and if it had been revealed to him that Mr. Boulger's chief reason for making the proposal was that he imagined he would have more control over a junior partner than he could have over a strong-willed and popular manager who, with a hundred thousand dollars at his back could always set up for himself, and might become a dangerous competitor, Tryon would only have smiled dryly. He knew that work tends to fall into the hands that can do it.

Half an hour later the street in which the Tryons lived began to fill with people. "The Banner" had insisted upon the desirability of a popular demonstration in honour of David Tryon, and the people were nothing loath to lighten the monotonous grind of life with a new and interesting celebration.

After a few minutes of waiting the crowd opened to allow free passage to the Mayor, Judge Whatley of the District Court, and the Rev. Mr. Jackson of the First Episcopal Church. As this committee entered the house the people cheered. After the usual greetings, the Mayor cleared his throat and began his speech, every word of which was heard through the open windows by the listening crowd.

"Mr. Tryon, it would be impossible, and I think it's unnecessary for me to tell you how deeply your courage and unselfish heroism have moved the hearts of your fellow-citizens. I have never seen anything like it. You have had our sympathy in

your sufferings; we rejoice in your restoration to health. Sir, we feel that you are an honour even to this great community, and it has been unanimously resolved in full City Council that this committee should express to you our appreciation of your conduct and should present you with this cheque for five thousand dollars as a token of the admiration which every citizen feels for your heroism. Sir, I'm proud to shake your hand."

Having suited the action to the word the sturdy hardware manufacturer moved a step or two to the rear amid the cheers of the crowd outside.

Judge Whatley spoke briefly in much the same strain, and then amid the renewed cheers of the populace Mr. Jackson began. Highly nervous and vain, but intensely matter-of-fact, he had been the first to propose to his congregation on the Sunday after the fire to make up for Tryon's unmerited suffering by a general subscription. His initiative had been followed; he was now modestly elated by his success and the position he held as mouthpiece. His reed-like piping came as a relief after the loud voice of the Mayor, and the hard high clearness of the Judge's utterance.

"I have been sent here, Mr. Tryon, to give unanimous expression to the feeling of Christians and Christian teachers in regard to your action. No words of mine can convey our admiration of it. 'Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his friend,' and yet to save the life of a coloured girl-child, a stranger, you imperilled your life and almost lost it. Your action was an emanation from the spirit of the Master

himself. Every person in this city, and many outside its limits, will be better men and women because of your deed. That is your reward. The money subscribed is but an expression of our admiration and gratitude—a thanks-offering to you for an act of Christian self-sacrifice and heroism such as has rarely been recorded in the annals of Time. It is as a Christian hero that we all value you, and hope that your life may be a long and happy one."

Mr. Jackson's words were listened to in respectful silence by the crowd, as by those inside the room. It was felt with a sort of astonishment that he had "put Tryon away up," and that Tryon deserved the honour paid him. As Mr. Jackson drew back, Tryon said simply, "I thank you, gentlemen, for your kindness."

In the pause which ensued Mr. Boulger found his opportunity. His vanity moved him to speech with irresistible force; his impressionability helped him to words.

"Mr. Mayor and Gentlemen,—I'd like to be allowed to say a few words, for in this matter I naturally feel strongly. I know David Tryon well, I've known him for years. I was glad when he came to work for me; I advanced him from clerk to cashier, and then made him manager, and I can say truly that I had learned to esteem him before the fire took place. I look upon him as a hero, and I'm proud to think he's going to be my son-in-law and my partner. Yes, sir, the firm of Boulger will in future be known as Boulger, Tryon and Co. I guess it'll get along all right. Dave's young,

but he's a hero, as Mr. Jackson has said, a Christian hero."

While Mr. Boulger covered his inability to find further words by shaking the Mayor vigorously by the hand, Tryon sat in silence. The cheering of the crowd, the eulogies pronounced upon his conduct moved him to momentary self-question.

"A hero? Had all heroes been like——"

THE INTERPRETER

(A MERE EPISODE)

THE INTERPRETER

(A MERE EPISODE)

IT was in the entrance hall of the Hotel de Roma at Madrid. I had come downstairs to see if I could get an interpreter or competent guide to accompany my wife to the Museum of the Prado, whilst I went off with a Toreador to a rustic wedding. There was a man in the hall who rather puzzled me; he was not well dressed enough for a visitor to the hotel; yet his eye did not seek mine with the servile solicitation which is the mark of the guide tribe in all civilized capitals, nor did he show that dignified indifference to one's obvious wants which is, so to say, the livery of the Spaniard in quest of employment. He was about the middle height, of commonplace appearance; but there was something in the thoughtful quietude of his look and manner that pleased me. As there was nothing for it but to speak to him, I made up my mind to speak in English: "Good morning."

"Good morning, sir," he answered quietly. His tone encouraged me.

"Do you happen to be an interpreter?" I asked.

"No, I am not an interpreter." There was something subdued, half melancholy, in his tone, but he was a Spaniard; the r's betrayed him unmistakably.

"What a bore," I said disconsolately, turning half aside; "Mazzantini will be waiting for me, and I wanted some one to go with my wife to the Museum."

"I shall be happy to accompany Madame," said the Spaniard, "and if Madame cares for paintings, she will have emotions in the Prado."

"Thanks, as you are not a guide, I must not trouble you."

"I often go with people to the Prado," he answered simply.

"But then," I went on with British love of a fact, "you must be either an interpreter or a guide."

"I am not an interpreter," he replied abruptly, his manner almost rude as he turned away.

"Well," I said, feeling my mistake, "at any rate you speak English better than any Spaniard I have met, and I dare say you know more about the pictures than the ordinary guide."

He turned to me, lifting his eyebrows in deprecating pity, and as my wife appeared at the moment, I confided her to his charge. When we met before dinner my wife spoke of him: "Such a strange man—so terribly enthusiastic. He bored me to extinction about Velasquez, and seemed quite hurt because I could not appreciate—'las Meniñas,' yes, that was the name—a quite absurd picture. Polite? Oh yes, for a foreigner and a man in his position."

After this I met the man frequently, and often talked with him. I found that he knew a great deal about the Spanish school of painting, and es-

pecially about Velasquez and Goya; but his knowledge was curiously fragmentary. He had evidently divined more than he had read, and his ideas about men and things had grown to have all the weight of facts for his mind. There was, too, a curious mixture of self-assertion and humility about him which I could not account for. I ventured to ask him, one evening, how he had come to learn so much about painting, and especially about Velasquez. He went on twirling a cigarette between his yellow-stained fingers, while his little brown eyes contracted with the effort of thinking. After a pause, he said:

"I was in the Prado every day, and somehow or other the little pictures grew hideous to me and the masterpieces more and more interesting."

"That's a rare experience," I said, "but not singular; I have a friend who declares that no one can really understand a picture till he has lived with it. But of course there are people who can appreciate even a masterpiece at first sight." As I saw he didn't agree with me, I went on probing: "Surely you must have got some of your knowledge from books?"

"Yes," he replied indifferently, "what I knew before, I found in books and little else. But most people like what they call facts, so I read in order to get facts. But I am so constituted that I can only remember such facts as possess some vital or spiritual significance, so I am not much better off for all my reading. Other men's knowledge doesn't help one much."

"Then you have always been a guide and interpreter?" I interrupted.

He turned upon me abruptly in a revolt of conceit:

"Oh yes, Señor, I was an interpreter once. I did not only interpret our language, but the pictures of our greatest masters in the Prado to ordinary visitors. You know that as a rule people do not see pictures at all until their beauties have been pointed out to them. Well, I revealed to Englishmen, Frenchmen and Germans the immortal works of Zurbaran, Velasquez, and Goya. And when there were any willing to listen, I went further and showed them how these masters had discovered their souls in their paintings; and thus I interpreted to foreign tourists the spiritual essence of our greatest. Ah, it was strange! For one who admired the strength and dignity of Zurbaran there were a dozen who loved the brutality of Goya, and the voluptuousness of his *mayas;* and for a score who understood Zurbaran, there was only one to care for the soul of Velasquez, who saw dwarfs and kings, ministers and women, horses and dogs, as God's sunlight sees them. Curious, isn't it? that only the noble can love nobility, and that a thousand wanted me to translate to them some silly piece of newspaper scandal for one who wished to understand how Velasquez felt towards Christ. . . . I began as a democrat," he went on, as if to himself, "but I soon came to hate and despise the people. Nine men out of ten have no reverence in them, no desire to learn and grow. I used to think my trade the best in the world,"

he broke off, —" in itself an education that refines and ennobles. Yes, oh yes," he repeated, nodding his head, while a sort of flush came over his sallow cheeks, " I was an interpreter—once."

In spite of his self-assertion the man impressed me; I noticed now a certain intellectuality in his breadth of brow and patient insistence in his peering eyes; his mouth, too, was very sensitive and refined. But underneath my sympathy there was the prickling of vulgar curiosity, and after a certain amount of lighter talk I couldn't help asking him:

" Why did you tell me the first evening that you were not an interpreter? And why don't you wear the band on your cap? "

He shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. I pressed him, and at length he spoke:

" When the visitors found out I was a real interpreter, they began to recommend me to their friends, and I got constant employment, more than I could do; and as I got money, I grew proud. The proprietor let me have rooms in the hotel. . . .

" One day, out of the season, an English gentleman, called Mr. Ponsonby, came here, and after spending a day in his room, he asked me what there was to do in this dull place, and I took him to the Prado. He was very affable and quick, and liked all I told him. He said I ought to have a great reputation, and when I said I thought I had, he said he did not mean that sort of reputation. I ought to write down what I knew about the painters, and the book would sell, and make me a reputation throughout Europe. We passed the

evening together in this café; see, at that table. All the next day, too, we spent together; he did not seem to want to be alone; it was so damned dull, he said, without anyone to talk to. He always read the English newspapers as soon as they came. Except for that time, I was with him every minute for three days.

"On the fourth morning, about nine o'clock, I was in the hall waiting for him, when suddenly there came up to me my sister's husband's brother's son, the youngest of the family. He was in the police and had got on. I had known him as a baby, and played with him often; his third name was José, after me. We began to talk. I asked him about the family; they all live in Toledo. And so we passed about ten minutes; then he said to me:

"'Are you doing anything now? Why don't you go and see them?'

"'Ah, no,' I replied; 'I stick to my work. Besides, I have an English gentleman here now, who takes me everywhere with him; such a nice gentleman, a Mr. Ponsonby.'

"'Is he in the hotel now?' he asked.

"'He is in his room; I am waiting for him,' was my answer.

"'Take me up to him, won't you? I think I have something to tell him—or something for him.'

"I forget exactly what he said; but I replied: 'All right, come on.'

"I was sure Mr. Ponsonby would not be angry with me; he was so pleasant, and I, like a vain fool, never paused to think. We went up to the

room, and I knocked at the door. Mr. Ponsonby asked sharply: 'Who's there?' and I said:

"'It is I, Mr. Ponsonby, your guide, José, who——'

"Then we heard him unlocking the door.

"As he opened it I began: 'Mr. Ponsonby, I have brought——'; but before I could finish, my sister's husband's brother's son stepped before me, and put his hand on Mr. Ponsonby's shoulder, saying in English (I did not know he knew a word of it):

"'Mr. Ponsonby Pigott, you must come with me.'

"I still did not understand, and I was a little angry at being pushed aside, so I went forward and asked him:

"'What do you mean?'

"He looked at me with a smile and said: 'Mr. Pigott understands; he is my prisoner.'

"Then I knew, and I said to my sister's husband's brother's son:

"'You have made me a spy like yourself, you devil. You have made me help to give my friend up, you low beast, you . . .' and I went on. I was mad with rage, because I felt the guilt in myself; but Mr. Ponsonby Pigott, he did not reproach me. He was too much of a gentleman; he grew a little pale, that was all.

"Pointing to the alcove where the bed stood, he asked the detective: 'May I go to get my brushes and things?'

"I stepped in front of the young man, and said:

"'Certainly, Mr. Ponsonby Pigott, you shall get what you like; he does not dare to disturb you.'

"Oh, I was determined to be a fine fool to the end! When he went to the alcove, I turned to my sister's husband's brother's son, and I spat on the floor and said—What did I not say? I have not forgiven him; he will see yet.

"All the while I was thinking what a brute I had been and fool, to be outwitted by a boy. Suddenly there came a click, and—as the detective rushed past me—the bang of a revolver. When we got to the alcove, there he lay, Mr. Ponsonby who had been so kind to me, all huddled up on the floor—with his brains scattered on the pillow and the wall—dead.

"Then I knew what I had done, and I turned and went out of the room, and in the hall they all met me, and asked:

"'What is the matter, Interpreter?'

"And I took the band on my cap with 'Interpreter' on it, and I tore it off my cap, and I said:

"'I am no interpreter, I am a fool.'

"I went out crying——

* * * * *

"Yes, I've heard he was a forger and a cheat; he may have been a bad man; but whatever crimes he committed, there was something kindly in him and noble; at all events he knew when to die. . . .

"I was greatly to blame, greatly; I was too self-sufficient and proud. That is why I will never wear the badge again nor call myself an interpreter. I am not worthy of the name; but if Mr.

Pigott had liked me as I liked him, and trusted me, I would have hidden him away here in Madrid, so that they would never have found him, never. I cannot bear to think of it now, he was so pleasant and kind——"

SONIA

SONIA

IT was a chance meeting—pure chance, if indeed there is such a thing. I was giving a sort of farewell dinner to people I had met in Munich; in another ten minutes I should have been in my own room and have missed her. She had only stopped with her mother to rest for the night on the way from Paris to Vienna and had come downstairs by chance—chance?

How well I remember the meeting! It was in the smoking-room of the Vierjahreszeiten Hotel. A couple of professors, some men from the embassies, and a captain of Uhlans had been dining with me. The dinner had been dull; our talk had gradually degenerated into spasmodic remarks; and in spite of the efforts of the French *attaché* to be witty in a language he had only a smattering of, I had come to the conclusion that specialists do not make good company, when suddenly I saw a face—a girl's face—looking through the upper part of the glass door. It disappeared, and I was just hoping that my guests would go away soon when the door opened and the girl came into the room and took a seat at the table almost opposite me. The room was a public room, usually used for smoking and coffee, but in Germany one does not expect to see a young woman act with independence and I was a little surprised. The curious part of the matter is that from the moment she

entered I remember everything that happened—every word she said, each of her slightest gestures—with extraordinary vividness. At first she was silent. She merely drew the black lace mantilla she was wearing a little further forward on her head and then let her eyes rest for a moment or two, first on one man and then on the next. There was nothing impertinent in her scrutiny, no curiosity even; the glance seemed merely meditative and impersonal; but the French *attaché* instinctively twisted his moustache to a bolder curve. When the eyes that had travelled round the half circle met mine, I was curiously interested. Was it the girl's indifference to the other men that piqued me? or was there something really impressive in her calm self-possession?

My looks must have betrayed the interest I felt in her; for she suddenly spoke to me in French, "You're not a German, are you?"

"No," I replied in the same tongue, "I am English. These gentlemen are guests of mine." Then taking my courage in both hands, I added, "If I had the pleasure of knowing your name, I would introduce them to you."

"No, please not," she said, quickly disposing of my attempt to bring my friends into the conversation; "I am glad you are English; I have wanted to know an Englishman for a long time." She spoke quickly, but with long pauses between the sentences; the effect was to heighten one's interest in what she was saying.

"I hope I may consider that as a compliment," I replied inanely. I never talked so stupidly as to

this girl on whom already I wished to make a good impression.

"Scarcely," she retorted with imperturbable seriousness; "the reverse, I think."

"Really," I exclaimed in amazement, "may I ask why?"

"It is plain; but—your guests are going."

And so they were. Headed by the French *attaché*, with his "*cher*," and "*combien je regrette*," and his bow that passed to the lady with a deep inclination of respectful reproach, they all took their leave. They had scarcely disappeared when I turned to speak to her again. But that was not her humour. Solemnly rising opposite me, she drew her heels together and bowed to me as if she had a hinge in her back with such an exact imitation of the German captain's salute that I could not help laughing. She laughed too—merrily, like a child.

"What strange people," she cried. "What strange people. Did you ever see such marionettes?"

"They are a little stiff," I admitted, "but you were going to tell me why you don't like Englishmen."

"I don't know any Englishmen," she said, looking at me with frank directness, "and from what I have read about them, I'm afraid I should not like them. I'm afraid not," she repeated decisively.

"What do you mean?" I asked; and while she set to work to answer me, I took the opportunity of looking at her in order to make up my mind whether she was really good-looking or not. I

knew already—her walk and movements showed—that she had a good figure; but her complexion was tallowy, as if she had lived much in close rooms, and it took more than one glance to see that her features were good. Perhaps the oval of the face was too round for beauty—the forehead was certainly too broad—but the eyes were really fine, a clear hazel flecked with gold, which doesn't at all explain the impression they gave of transparent sincerity and courage. Her *staccato* manner of speaking with long pauses between each sentence became more marked, I noticed, when the subject matter interested her.

"The French—we know what they are," she began. "Nothing will ever alter them. The Germans, too, we know; they are all like that,"—with a gesture that seemed to people again the empty room. "But the English are hard to know well. They have done great things in the past—brought political liberty into life and built up a great empire; but one feels as if their work were finished. Don't you know what I mean? A selfish individualism is the soul of them—the characteristic—and that is not what we want to-day."

I was more than interested, I was much astonished and half annoyed at her frank if somewhat doctrinaire criticism.

"I don't know exactly what you mean," I replied. "What do you find us lacking in? We don't seem yet to have failed in the world," I added, with more composure, feeling that at last I had got on safe ground.

"That's just it," she retorted quickly, laying

her hand on the table, "you are successful, and therefore satisfied, as if material success and contentment were not a proof of spiritual failure."

"Now I'm afraid you have got beyond me," I replied, and, half to cover my pique, I forced a smile, "unless, indeed, you will mention a nation that has failed materially and yet been a spiritual success."

"Athens," she cried, with a look of astonishment. (Her eyes were magnificent.) "And Judea —they both speak to the soul and are more interesting to humanity than Rome, for instance, with its insensate pride and lust of domination."

I was silenced, if not convinced. No satisfactory reply suggesting itself at the moment, I tried to make our talk lighter, more personal, by asking:

"And what countrywoman are you?"

"Guess," she threw out with a smile.

"I am at a loss," I replied hesitatingly. "You are dark, and might be a Spaniard from the mantilla. But you have no accent in French and none in German that I can distinguish. I am puzzled."

"You are mistaken," she said, "I have an accent in German—a strong accent. I am a Russian."

"A Russian. Strange! I'm going to Russia soon." Her look of interest exciting me, I went on: "A teacher at Oxford put the idea into my head; an odd mixture, he is, of art-critic and socialist."

"What is his name?" she asked.

"Oh, you would scarcely have heard of him,

and yet he's interesting; his name's Ruskin; a sort of professor at Oxford, and a wonderful writer."

"So," she said, "he has sympathies with the poor, has he?"

"The deepest sympathy; he gave nearly all his fortune away to them and preached a sort of new crusade in their favour."

"An Englishman?" she asked wonderingly.

"Yes, indeed," I replied warmly. "There's nothing strange in that, surely. Everyone must admit that we have done more for the poor than any other nation."

"We knew you had more to do," she replied, and then after a long pause, she added, "but not that you had done more."

"I wish you knew Ruskin," I went on, feeling that his fine personality gave me the best chance of interesting her. "He is all enthusiasm and unselfishness—a remarkable man. He had a great influence at Oxford and did a lot of good."

"And now you are coming to Russia?"

"Yes, that was a sort of farewell dinner I was giving."

"Then you are coming at once?"

At this moment the door opened and a young man entered the room. The girl presented him simply—"My brother;" we bowed and shook hands. One thing was sure; he was utterly unlike his sister. She was tall and graceful, whereas he was below the average height and very slight. A little, thin, nervous apparition with the tiniest hands, and dressed with excessive care like a French dandy.

His sister went on, "This gentleman is thinking of coming to Russia to learn Russian and he is interested in social questions. We are too, are we not, André?" and she put her arm caressingly on the young man's shoulder.

"You are," he said smiling; the glance was sympathetic and made me like him.

I don't know why, but the entrance of this new person on the scene seemed to remove the girl from me, and I was surprised to find resentment in me at the discovery. I determined to do my best to keep up the acquaintance.

"I was telling your sister," I began, "that I was just leaving Munich to go to Russia. I hope we may meet there."

"But if you are going soon," she said, "why not go with us? We are leaving for Vienna this evening by the express."

"Yes," said the young man, nodding in answer to my look of inquiry, "why not come with us?"

"But you have probably a father or a mother who might object to my intrusion."

"Oh, no," the girl broke in, "my mother is resting upstairs, but I am sure that she would be glad if you would come with us. And then we might learn more about Ruskin and his socialistic ideas."

"Are you sure she wouldn't object?" I insisted.

"Of course, I'm sure; but I will write and ask her and show you what she says. Then you will know." She turned to the table and drew the writing materials towards her.

"You see," the brother said, smiling to me, "everyone does what Sonia wants. She always has her own way, and it is generally a good way."

As he spoke, the girl turned round blushing vividly and looking wonderfully pretty. "Now, Andrushka, you are praising me and that's not allowed. Besides, if you talk about me how can I write my letter? I must listen;" and she laughed at the implied confession.

A moment later she had rung the bell and given the note to the waiter.

"Now tell me of your Ruskin," she said, turning round in her chair. "He interests me. He must be like a man I knew in Petersburg, who had a great influence on me, Michailoff. He was a great man in some ways, a great intelligence, but he was not good."

"Ah," I said, "Ruskin is good. That's perhaps the secret of his power." Somehow or other, I felt that I was carrying my audience with me in my enthusiasm and the impulse to continue overcame me. "His belief comes from the heart and he is not afraid to speak to the heart." (She nodded with quick approval.) "In one of his lectures at Oxford—a lecture to a thousand, irreverent under-graduates—I remember he paused in the middle of something he was saying and turned upon us with the words, 'We should all be frequent in breaking bread with the poor.' The effect was extraordinary; one felt that Jesus must have spoken like that.

"It was he who put the idea into my head of studying social questions on the Continent; he

thought that the student, like the apprentice, should have his *Wanderjahre.*"

At this moment the German waiter came in and handed the girl a note. After one glance at it she handed it to me. It was from her mother and this is how it began: "Je serai charmée de faire la connaissance d'un Anglais; ils sont si comme-il-faut. Ton ami sera le bienvenu. . . ."

"You see," said Sonia quietly, "my mother has answered as I knew she would. Now you will come, won't you?"

"I can hardly come to-night," I replied. "I have to pack and some friends to see; but I will follow. If you will tell me the hotel you are going to in Vienna, I will follow you—in forty-eight hours at most."

At this they both rose: the brother seemed too nervous to sit still for any length of time.

"Your Ruskin interests me," the girl said quietly, "and you interest me more, for you may act while he has only talked or written." (She spoke without a trace of coquetry.) "I shall be glad to see you in Vienna. I am glad already that I did not obey my first impulse and run away when I looked through the door and saw you all sitting there like automatons, so stiff and prim," and she laughed again at the recollection.

"Did you really feel shy?" I asked. "You seemed perfectly composed."

"I'm glad," she replied; "shyness is childish. One has to conquer those impulses, don't you think?"

Since I had talked of Ruskin, her manner had

grown quite friendly, and the change pleased me.

At this moment her brother opened the door, and she passed out of the room with the words, "The Ring Hotel, Wednesday afternoon," on her lips. I stood looking after her, feeling as if some of the brightness had gone out of the air and the warmth. . . .

Until that day I had never thought myself very impressionable, but I was now to learn the extraordinary influence a girl could exercise on me after a single meeting. At first I seemed to feel nothing but surprise at her intelligence. We had only talked for a short time and yet she had astonished me; was "material success" really "a proof of spiritual failure?" as she had said. I could not believe that; it seemed a paradox to me, and yet a paradox full of disquieting possibilities. She had evidently peculiar standards. The talk about Ruskin had touched her emotions; was he her ideal? Hardly. Almost her last words showed that she preferred men of action to writers or speakers. And then my thought passed to her confession that when she first looked into the room she had felt too shy to enter it, and I dwelt on that; it seemed to bring her closer to me. Her manner, too, had been wholly womanly and sympathetic when she told me she would be glad to see me in Vienna. I kept recalling this and her delicious shyness, and her vivid blushing under her brother's praise. In spite of her intellect, she was a woman —charming. I wanted to see her again; I would go to the train to see them off, I thought. No,

that would appear too marked an attention. I mustn't make a fool of myself; I didn't know who she was, nor her name even. But I should like to know what she meant exactly, when she said that I might *act;* as if deeds were more than any speech or book. What sort of action did she mean? . . .

I went out for my usual walk in the afternoon, but I walked as one in a dream. I could not help recalling her words, her rare gestures, her looks—every glance had meaning in it. By the way, what a funny trick of speaking she had; nervously abrupt and quick, with long pauses. Was that like her shyness, an impulse held in rein by reason? And why was shyness so wonderful and charming in her? In was common enough in other girls and in them rather uninteresting. The whole charm lay, of course, in the magic of her personality. She might be anyone, I felt, or do anything. I could not quite understand her, and that excited me. . . .

Why should I not go to the train? She had been perfectly frank with me; why should I not be as ingenuous with her? I wanted to go; that was certain. I wanted to see her again; to feel the cool, firm hand, and win from her, if possible, another expression of interest in me. Yes, that was it. I desired this girl's interest and her praise more than I ever desired praise from anybody in my life. I felt that what she said would be absolutely sincere. That was not love, I said to myself; it was the effect her nature made on mine. In reality I wanted praise. I, go to the station. It was silly not to go. I, meet them on the plat-

form with some flowers—one bunch for the mother and one for the girl. That would make it look all right. I, hurry back and get the flowers. . . .

I was on the platform waiting for them before the train was made up. I had a Dienstmann with me carrying my bouquets, and had already paid him and given him most definite instructions to make himself scarce, the moment I took the flowers from him, when suddenly I saw them coming towards me. They were almost the first arrivals, and walking towards them I thought, "we shall have quite ten minutes together." The mother was being wheeled along in a chair, and the daughter was walking by her side. The old lady was very stout and seemed almost incapable of moving, but her eyes were bright and intelligent—hazel too, though far smaller than her daughter's; and as soon as the daughter presented me with, "This is the gentleman, mother," she told me in very perfect French that she was glad to see me and still more glad to think that I should meet them in Vienna and go with them to their place near Petersburg.

"I am a great invalid," she went on, "but Sonia and André will keep you company, and if you want to learn Russian, it is certainly dull enough at —— to learn anything."

Of course I thanked her and said how sorry I was to see that she was not strong, but she interrupted me briskly:

"Oh, I am strong, quite strong; it is my body that is weak, and above all lazy—very lazy," and she laughed.

"Mother says that," said Sonia, "but she is indeed ailing. You know you were very ill in Paris, mother."

"Ah, dear Paris," repeated the old lady, with a sigh, "how I love it, with its frivolity and gaiety. It is all so pleasant to me. There seems to be no winter there, and in Russia it is all winter and solitude, and I hate it."

"You see," said the girl gravely, "mother is scarcely a Russian. She speaks very little Russian; she lived nearly all her youth in Paris; her father was in the Embassy there. I often say she is not a Russian or she could not speak of Russia as she does."

"Of course," retorted the mother with a comical little smile, "children nowadays know more than their parents. But I must be getting into the train. I am very heavy and almost helpless."

In a few minutes we had got her into the carriage and settled her among books and wraps, and then for the first time I remembered my flowers and handed her a bouquet, which brought forth voluble thanks. She loved flowers, she said; it was so kind of me to think of them; an old woman was not used to such attentions, and so forth.

My opportunity had come. Turning to the girl, I gave her the other bouquet, and in a voice which I made as matter of course as possible, asked her to walk up the platform with me. With rare opportuneness, the brother had gone off to get papers, and without a word Sonia turned from the carriage and I was alone with her. I hardly knew how to begin.

"You love Russia," I said, still under the impression of the feeling with which she had spoken.

She turned to me and nodded slowly.

"Yes, I love it," she said. "I love it with all my heart and soul." After a pause she went on, "our peasants call it 'Holy Russia,' you know, and to us it is even more than that. The other European nations are uninteresting. What they have done, they will do again; their course is traced; the orbit known. Their future will be as common as their past. But everything is possible to Russia. If humanity is ever to do or be anything great, if men are ever to rise to the possibilities in them and live noble lives, it must be in Russia. She is the last of the European nations to enter into her birthright. How can one help loving her, 'Holy Russia!'"

She spoke with extraordinary passion; but what she said was too reasoned and decided, I thought; it seemed to put a great distance between us; I hardly knew how to answer her. The conversation went lamely afterwards, and in a minute or so the bell rang. As she entered the carriage, she said:

"I shall be looking for you on Wednesday afternoon. You are sympathetic."

Perhaps it was her foreign phrase that made me act like a foreigner; I bowed my head to her and kissed her hand, and the next moment she was in the train and had taken her seat. I remember shaking hands with her brother; but she did not come to the window, and I went away from the station with a vision in my mind of her first ap-

pearance as I saw her walking by the side of her mother's chair, tall and graceful.

When I thought over this meeting I was disappointed; nothing new had come to me from her. The truth probably was that I had already been moved so intensely in the afternoon that my feelings were incapable of receiving another new and profound impression of the same sort in the evening. But still her strength of character and passionate enthusiasm were clearer to me than they had been. Her soul appeared to me like a flame of extraordinary steadiness and height. An astonishing girl, I said to myself, most astonishing!

As my stay in Munich drew to an end I began to dwell more and more on the womanly and charming side of her character, and especially on the interest she seemed to take in me; and so I cultivated, I suppose, the growth of a similar feeling in myself. All through life we are merely children, and turn naturally to what is sweet to us; but my longing for the pleasant fruit was checked by a sort of natural caution. I could see that my new friends were people of some importance, but I resolved to find out much more about them before I committed myself definitely, and thus I lulled my inborn prudence to rest.

On the Wednesday morning, when I got into the train, I could not help noticing that my usual indifference had deserted me. I was so unnaturally eager that every now and again I had to laugh at my own impatience. I took no interest in what went on about me; in imagination I was already

at the goal, standing before her, looking into her eyes, touching her hands. And so I lived in my dream-paradise, shutting out as far as I could the banalities of the railway journey. As soon as I had unpacked my luggage and made myself decent, I got the waiter to take me to their sitting-room. In a moment Sonia was before me, holding out both hands to me. I took them in some surprise; the mute appeal was so intense; but her first words explained everything.

"He is so ill," she cried. "Andrushka. I was afraid; but now you have come, it will all be right," and she sighed with relief.

"Ill!" I repeated. "Sit down and tell me about it. What is the matter? When did it begin?"

"He must have caught cold," she replied. "You know he has always been very delicate, and he won't take care of himself. We reached Vienna very early on Tuesday morning; it was cold, and he must have caught a chill, for in the afternoon he complained of headache and pains in his limbs, so I put him to bed and sent for a doctor. But the fever has increased; his temperature rose all through the night, and though it is supposed to go down a little in the morning, it has not gone down but gone up, ever since the beginning, and the doctor looks very grave."

Tears came into her eyes. I wanted to take her in my arms and console her, and the impulse was so strong that I rose to my feet in order by brusque movement to throw it off.

"What does the doctor call it?" I asked.

"Dangerous fevers don't come like that in a day from any ordinary chill."

"You will see the doctor," she replied. "He will be back in an hour or so, and you must ask him. But since you have come I am less anxious."

She spoke like a child, a tired child, and as I took in the weariness of her face, I said:

"You have been up all night. You have not changed your clothes, I am sure. Now go away at once and change. Then you must come back and have some tea."

She nodded her head again like a child and smiled faintly as she passed into the room on the other side of the sitting-room. In half an hour she was back again looking far brighter and better. We had tea together, and I for one enjoyed it. Then began for us a perpetual interchange of emotions, a partnership of hopes and fears which gradually drew us closer and closer in sympathy and mutual comprehension.

I saw at once that her love for her brother had made her excessively anxious about him; the quickness of her intelligence acting on her ignorance of disease had frightened her so that she dreaded the worst before there was any cause for anxiety. Of course, I set myself to combat her fears and give her confidence, and I got the German doctor to help me. At first he wanted to make out that the case was serious. All doctors do this, I think; it exalts one's opinion of their skill if the patient recovers, and if he chance to die—well, the doctor is safe, for at the very beginning he said it was serious. But pushed into a corner, the doctor had to

admit that dangerous fevers are generally of long inception; and that young André was probably suffering from nothing but a feverish attack which would pass off almost as quickly as it had come. I was more than repaid for all my efforts when Sonia said to me after the doctor had left:

"What courage you give me! what confidence!"

I tried to persuade her to go to bed and let me sit up in her stead, but this she would not hear of. Nor could I persuade her to dine with me. She felt quite strong, she said, after the tea, and did not want anything more. All I could do was to order a cup of *consommé* to be left in the room and make her promise to take it during the night, and then she insisted on my going. I was not to stay in the sitting-room; I was not to return after my dinner; she felt she ought not to leave her brother or to see me again that evening. No, it must be good-bye till to-morrow morning, and all I could do was to repeat, "Good-night, good-night, Sonia," and take my leave.

I went to the dining-room rather pleased with myself. I felt that I had made considerable progress; I had called her "Sonia" without rebuff. I saw that she liked me, too; and altogether I was pretty confident. In this hopeful mind I made a good dinner, went to bed, and slept like a top.

In the morning I called upon her only to find her even more anxious than she had been the day before. The patient had scarcely slept at all; his temperature was still going up; the pulse rapid and fitful. In spite of her attempts at self-con-

trol, Sonia was evidently very nervous, and I had harder work to arouse her courage this time because she was tired out with another night's watching and sleeplessness. I could not persuade her to go to rest or let me take her place. It was enough for her, she said, that I was in the hotel. It did her good. But she would not hear of me as a nurse; that was her business.

"But," I said, "you are wearing yourself out. You are suffering already; you will make yourself ill if you go on like this."

"Think of what he is suffering," she said in a pitiful little whisper, and turned to go to him again. I tried to keep her in the room, and when I saw that was impossible, tried to make her promise to see me again in an hour, but she wouldn't. I could come back in the afternoon, she said, or better still in the evening at seven o'clock, when the doctor was to come, and then she would see me. She seemed to take a positive pleasure in her own weariness and discomfort, as if her suffering could diminish her brother's.

I went out, walked about, and bought some necessaries, and thus wore through a gloomy and stupid day. I had begun to blame myself for always giving in to Sonia; the man, it seemed to me, should make his will dominant, whereas I was continually doing what she wished. Then I remembered what her brother had said, that everyone did what Sonia wished, and that usually her way was the best way, and with this thought I tried to appease my vanity. But a spirit of revolt was in me, a resolve to have my way a little, and so in the evening I

waylaid the doctor in the porch of the hotel and persuaded him to take my side and insist on Sonia's going to bed. A compliment or two made him willing to do all I wanted. She was very nervous and over-sensitive, he said, and the brother had no constitution and seemed to have wasted the greater part of the little vital energy he was born with. "The girl is strong and healthy," was his conclusion, "but the boy is a poor creature."

After he had been in the bedroom a few minutes, I went into the sitting-room and waited for them, and when they came in together, I attacked at once. But in spite of the doctor's assistance I should not have carried my point if I had not shown Sonia that the only way to sit up on Saturday night and on Sunday night was to go to bed on Friday night. Then she consented, on my promising to wake her up if any change took place in the patient's condition; but before she would go to her room she gave me a multitude of minute directions. At length I was left alone with the patient. He did not seem to know me, but that was not very wonderful, as his temperature was about 104. If it went up a point higher I was to give him a little weak brandy and water, otherwise nothing but milk and soda, and I was to take his temperature every two hours.

At ten o'clock I found his temperature nearly 105. I gave him some brandy and water. Holding his pulse, I soon noticed that the stimulant had done him good; it was strength he needed; I repeated the dose again and again. At twelve o'clock his temperature was 103, and as I turned

from him I saw that Sonia had come to the bedside. I immediately led her away into the sitting-room; told her of the fortunate turn the fever had taken, and insisted upon her going to bed. But it needed no insistence; she was quite reasonable now.

"I am so glad," she said over and over again, and almost immediately afterwards, "Do you know, I am very tired and thirsty. Might I have something to drink?"

I poured her out some soda and milk, and had the satisfaction of hearing her promise that she would go to bed at once. After that I closed her own door on her and went again to her brother's bedside. It was all plain sailing afterwards. The patient's temperature gradually diminished, until at six o'clock it was barely 101, or less than it had been on Wednesday afternoon.

I had the chart in my hand and was studying it in the half-light of the curtain-shaded room, when I suddenly felt a hand on my shoulder and the next moment Sonia put her finger on the chart with a little gleeful whisper:

"Then it was true! I'm so glad. He's much better, isn't he?" and as I replied very confidently, "He is all right, I think," she took my head in both her hands and kissed me twice on the forehead.

"You have cured him," she said. "I knew you would; you are all health, one with nature and life—not overwrought or tortured, I mean, like we are. And I, of course, I kept awake for days, and then at the crisis overslept myself."

She looked so dainty fresh as she spoke that I

tried to take her in my arms, but she drew herself away from me at once with a finger on her lips and a glance at the bed, so that I could only smile my entire satisfaction.

"Come out," she said, "and tell me all about it," and in the sitting-room I told her of the happy change.

All she said was, "You cured him. I felt sure you would from the first, you healer!" When I tried to give the doctor the credit, she would not have it; she merely shook her head imperiously and said, "I know, I know." And in this state the doctor found us.

After a short examination of the patient he confirmed us in the belief that the crisis was over and that there was no longer any danger. In fact he declared that as the day was going to be warm the windows of the sick-room could be opened and the patient might take a little *bouillon*. He had brought a nurse with him, too, and insisted that she should take Sonia's place at the bedside.

"But what shall I do?" asked Sonia, in a dismal way that made us both laugh.

"Well," he said, "I think you had better go for a drive and have a pleasant day after all your anxieties."

I could have hugged him for the suggestion, which I took care, however, to receive in as matter of course a way as possible. When I said that I would come back at eleven with a carriage, the doctor backed me up valiantly as one who knew that he was pleasing his clients by his determined attitude.

"I will answer for the patient," he said; "you go and enjoy yourselves."

"But first I must tell mother," said Sonia; and she hurried off.

After my tub and breakfast I felt completely refreshed, so spent my time in hunting up the best droshky I could find; and punctually at eleven I called for Sonia. She had only to put her hat on, she said, but first I must come in and see how much better André was. I found a marvellous change in him. His face was peaky and white, of course, and his hands thin to transparency, but he looked something like his old self and had developed, the nurse said, a remarkable appetite. He was almost too weak to speak, but he smiled at us and seemed quite comfortable.

Shall I ever forget that drive, I wonder. We went down the Ring, through the crowds and past the shops, and then out along the Prater. The air was like champagne. In spite of the sun's warmth it was cool under the trees, with the Danube water gleaming through the leaves on our left. Everything was gay and bright in the summer sunshine, and Sonia chattered away with the absolute unconsciousness of a happy child. What she said I don't know, and I would not reproduce it if I could. It was all so light and unimportant and happy, just the natural rebound of her spirit from the depression and anxiety of the last few days.

Suddenly she said she was hungry, and I asked her which was the best place to get something to eat. She called out the name of a restaurant to

the driver, who at once turned towards the city. The restaurant stood on one of the corners of the Ringstrasse, but Sonia insisted on the driver going to the side-entrance.

"The private rooms are there," she explained, "and we don't want to go into a public room today, do we?"

Of course, I agreed with her, but a little chill came over me. Had she gone to a private room before, I wondered? With some other man, perhaps? The gaiety and intoxication seemed to have gone out of the air. As I followed her up the red carpeted stairs, I was plunged back into my old self and became a little more critical even than usual.

But Sonia would not have it, and sulkiness was impossible in her company. The lunch was to be the most wonderful lunch that was ever ordered; I must choose it all; but she was very hungry and it must come quick. And wasn't the bread in Vienna the best I had ever eaten, and wasn't it a glorious day, and splendid to be together, till at last I, too, entered into her mood and talked and laughed without knowing why.

The lunch was not half over however when Sonia declared she must hurry and get back. In vain I remonstrated with her. I told her that in Vienna the coffee was even better than the bread and that I wanted some, but she would not listen to me. She must go back. If I wanted to, I could stay and drink my old coffee; she'd go home by herself. Before I knew what I was doing she had whisked me downstairs and into the droshky.

At the staircase of the hotel she left me, telling me that she would be back in a quarter of an hour; and she was back in that time. André, it appeared, was really much better; his mother was sitting with him and we were free to go wherever we liked. So off we went, side by side, into the solitude of the crowded streets.

From this day our true companionship began, an intimacy of every hour, which lasted for weeks and weeks and makes it impossible for me to attempt to chronicle any single day's doings. I remember nearly every hour of it, though I must resolve now not to tell everything I remember; but simply the deepest impressions made upon me, whatever was at once novel and enduring in our intercourse.

One morning, for instance, was spent in the Belvedere Gallery; Sonia wanted to show me this, that, and the other picture. I soon found she was a most interesting guide. She did not judge like any one else whom I had ever seen. She evidently knew something about painting and loved colours for their own sake; but her judgment was always of the spirit. I do not mean by that that she judged pictures from the literary point of view—by the story they told; she seemed to judge them by the soul in them, the amount of emotion they contained; and she was often quite curiously right, I thought. In this way and that the days passed, and for some time I was content to feel that our intimacy was growing happier, the lighter side of her nature was charming to me.

What surprised me most in her was that she did

not at once lose that frank gaiety of spirit I had noticed in her for the first time on the morning after her brother's recovery. Again and again she forced me to laughter by her quaint imitations of the faces and gestures we saw in street and café. Everything that was unreal or artificial struck her humour, and she was continually taking off the endless affectations of the Germans, the pompousness of the men and the trivialities of the women, with a power of mimicry that would have made her fortune on the stage. But though the humour was light and joyous, one felt every now and then piercing through it the contempt of a sincerer race, or at least of a race with a surer instinct and understanding of the art of living.

"The Germans," she said once, "are like their language, large, but ill-formed and awkward; disciplined mediocrities they all seem to me, and their women, hens, 'Cluck, cluck, cluck, kaffée klatsch!'" and her laughter had contempt and dislike in it. And just as I noticed a seriousness behind her mimicry so I soon felt a deep melancholy underlying her almost feverish gaiety. Sometimes she would brood for hours without speaking, till I roused her, in fact, and sometimes she would grow bitterly indignant at some little snobbism that seemed to me perfectly harmless. She was a *revoltée*, I told myself; but the changes in her of temper and nature fascinated me and day by day her beauty grew upon me; for I now saw that she was beautiful or more than beautiful. The slim grace of her figure was as the swaying of a lily-stem in water and her eager face with the

soulful eyes and sensitive mouth was infinitely seductive.

From hour to hour passion grew in me till I lost count of all she did or said that did not feed my desire, and at last I spoke. We had spent the morning, I remember, with her brother and mother, and in the afternoon while they went shopping together, she and I drove out as by mutual consent along the river. She was in a strange mood; now she would rally me on my silence, and when I spoke, would herself begin to brood. We left the carriage at my impulse to avoid the coachman, and as we walked together in perfect solitude among the trees I tried to speak; but my mouth was parched as with fever. I stood still, and the scene rises again before me as I write. There within reach of me the slight figure, etched against the coppery reds and golds and greens of sunset. On this side of the sky, tones of turquoise and sapphire blended with the iris of mother of pearl, and on that side, cloud-castles of fantastic architecture shot through by jets of flame glowed and faded in a final conflagration. I could not speak; I stretched out my arms and drew her to me, and turned her face up to mine and kissed her as if I would never part from her again. I was surprised at my own passion; for a moment or two she was wholly mine. As she moved away from me I asked her hungrily:

"Do you love me, Sonia? You know I love you."

Her eyes dwelt on mine with pitying tenderness; but in a moment she regained self-mastery:

"Yes; but—"

"But what?" I exclaimed. "What do you mean? What can separate us if we love each other. Every time you give me a little of yourself, you take it back next time we meet. Why?"

"Don't say that," she cried appealingly, "I would give you anything, everything, gladly, if I were free."

"But you are free," I cried hotly. "You told me that you cared for no one else and are engaged to no one."

"Ah," she said, "don't let us talk and spoil the golden hours. Love me if you can and I will love you as I can. For a little while we are together, and the past is far away and affection's sweet," and she laid her hand on my arm and gave herself to me in a look. I didn't understand her; but I drew her to me and kissed her mouth. The slim body fluttered in my hands as a bird flutters, and then was still; but as she felt me against her I saw the vivid flush rise in her cheeks and she began to draw herself away from me, slowly but irresistibly. I was conscious of the determination in her and let her go; for something told me that time was on my side and that the sweetness of our caresses would grow on her and not diminish. In silence we walked together and soon she took my hand and put it to her cheek, and we went on hand in hand like children, while my heart leaped in gladness and I could have thanked God for the winning of my imperious delight.

But my hopes fell very low in the days that followed. Again and again my passionate exclama-

tion came back to me as the exact truth—whenever she gave me a little of herself, she seemed to take it back the next time we met. I had perpetually to reconquer her, and this intensified my desire and exasperated my nerves, till at times I was little better than an animal. Scarcely ever did she yield enough to call forth in me that divine tenderness which is the seventh heaven of passion.

It was about this time that she began to ask me about myself and my plans for my future life. Naturally I told her everything. I described the old days in the Union at Oxford, and said that I wanted to enter Parliament, hoping to do some little good. Somehow or other the more enthusiastically I talked, the colder she seemed to become. I could not account for it; and yet—God help me!—I tried to win her by exaggerating sympathies which were not the deepest in me. I told her of what had been done for the poor in England; I described the working of the Factory Acts and the Poorhouses, and pointed out that more would have to be done; that pensions for the aged poor would be established by the State and all taxes on necessaries would be abolished, while the taxes on luxuries would be greatly increased. It was all no good. She listened with a curious interest which was a part of her intellectual being, but behind the mask of sympathetic manner I felt a barrier of resolute indifference I could not explain or account for.

As the days went on and the date of our departure came nearer, she seemed to grow colder, more detached; she certainly yielded herself less

to me. What was the mysterious influence that was drawing her from me?—I asked myself in vain. Again and again I tried to win her; but her resolution stood firm. Now and then she'd let herself go to love for a moment; but the next moment she'd draw back. I was really half glad when our stay came to an end. André was completely cured, and his mother wished to spend the full summer in her country house. Just before starting, my exasperated nerves gave way, and I reproached Sonia with her coldness, and told her that her reserve was drawing out the worst in me and not the best. As soon as I said that, she put her hand on my mouth and looked at me with such a passion of deprecation and regret, that I choked my thoughts to silence. In vain I cudgelled my brains for some explanation of her conduct; I could find none. It was really enough to drive one mad, the continual vain groping to understand the enigma; and yet the clue was to be given me sooner than I dared to hope.

We had resolved to go over Warsaw to Petersburg; for their country-house —— was only about thirty miles up the Neva from the capital. If I would, I could not describe the long journey from Vienna to Warsaw. I was chiefly occupied in amusing the mother and daughter and attending to their comforts, hoping vaguely in some way or other to make myself pleasant to them through companionship. The wish to ingratiate myself, which seemed to me a degradation and to some extent an abdication of my manhood, had come to me from that last fortnight in Vienna, in which the

fear of losing my love had grown upon me like a nightmare. The journey was pleasant enough. André and his mother were interested in every detail, and that gave rest to Sonia and myself. We spent a night in Warsaw, in a huge ill-furnished hotel, and the next day we were off again over the boundless bare plains that seemed to me so depressing. In the afternoon I remember we crossed the true Russian frontier at —— I forget the name of the station. As soon as we started again, I found on entering the train that Sonia had lowered the double windows in one part of the corridor and was leaning out. I walked up to her and half-timidly put my hand on her shoulder. She did not draw away; for a moment or two she did not even seem to notice it, and then she turned to me with tears shining in her eyes and her whole face quivering.

"Russia," she said, "our Russia! Don't you love it? I love every bit of it. You said a little while ago in Poland that the boundless plains were monotonous. My God, how could you have said that? There is the great earth, naked and fruitful where men labour, where they are born and live and die, and over them the heavens arched. 'Ugly,' you said. These plains ugly! And you talked of the need of wood and hill to make a scene beautiful, just like a landscape gardener. Ah, if it is ugly, I love its ugliness. Here at any rate one can take long breaths uncontaminated and feel oneself alone. I return to nature as to a mother when I get back to Russia, and feel myself at one with the earth and air and sky."

"But won't you think of England, Sonia?" I said, "and our lives there."

"Oh!" she answered imperiously, "there it is again, England, England. But what can we do in England, I ask you? You told me that there were dozens of men from her universities, just like you—well-born, well-taught and far too well-dressed," and she put her hand on me deprecatingly, "eager to enter Parliament, to extend the already overgrown British Empire and to debase poverty with the cast-off clothes and broken meats of waste. England is finished, I tell you," and she sprang upright, "she is hide-bound in her traditions and her past, and her conventions choke her; but here we have to make traditions. Think of that. We are not bound in any way; we are only asked to make our lives memorable. Ah! there is a thirst in me for great deeds. I hate your ordinary commonplace life. There! it is said." And she began to move up and down like a caged wild thing, heedless of the people in the other compartments who stared out at her. In a moment or two she stopped by me again:

"Will no man be born like Russia, worthy of her?" and she put her hands on my shoulders and her passion swept her away.

"Don't you see how we want a man?" she cried. "Every nation wants one. Look at that accursed German emperor! Because the French stole Alsace from Germany, when he took it back again, he stole Lorraine with it. Lorraine, the country of Jeanne d'Arc! Lorraine that is all French, that is as much French as Berlin is German! The ignoble

thief! And now he might give it back and give peace to the world as well and establish right as a sacred thing, and he is content to drill and dress and feed and sleep. Will no one kill the dog and make place for a better man?"

Her reckless violence shocked me. "His successor would be no better," I said, "probably worse."

"Not so," she said, with eager pointing hand, "were his father swept away terribly the son might listen to his conscience. The one great fact would bring him nearer to all other facts. . . . Ah, to think of it. Any one of those Hohenzollerns by giving back Lorraine to France might win immortal reputation by a single generous act. There are two crowns before each of them—the heavy, hard gold symbol, and the exquisite circlet forged of peace and love and the gratitude of humanity. And they all choose the metal crown and strut through bowing apes and stand in God's sunshine without fear."

She seemed no longer conscious of my existence. Her speech was like a storm torn by flashes of hate and sarcasm.

"And here in Russia it is worse. We have a nincompoop as Tsar—an Alexander," she said bitterly, "when we want a great man. Was there ever such irony? The people ask him for liberty, for a patch of land, for ordered peaceful life—space for their souls to breathe in—and he sits on their necks choking them. And our people are so kind, so patient, so long-suffering. 'A good man!' they call him, it maddens me to hear

them. Will no one free us from the lies and liars?"

"Ah," I said, "you are kicking against the pricks. Every fine nature does that."

"And gets tired of doing it too, eh?" she said, sinking down into her seat wearily and staring again out of the window.

I did not know what to say. Her recklessness had surprised me, shocked me, too, a little. I moved to her and put my hand again on her shoulder. She sighed restlessly, but did not move, and so we stood for a long time together, till I went back to the others and left her still sitting there.

An hour or so afterwards André looked out of the door and saw her, and turned again to his ordinary chatter with a shrug of the shoulders:

"Sonia is in one of her moods. To be severely left alone is the only cure."

But I could not take this philosophic view. I was still shaken by the passion with which she had spoken—shaken and surprised. What did it mean, this storm of enthusiasm, and what was to be the outcome of it? I could not guess. It was long before my heart began to beat equably again, and then I felt incapable of thought, exhausted, as one snatched up to the heights where living is a delirium.

It was late at night, and everyone was waiting for the beds to be made up before she came in. She had evidently been crying. Her face was startling in its pallor; the eyes seemed half-dead and drooping like flowers beaten by heavy rain.

She made no attempt to conceal her tears, but simply sat down in her corner wiping her eyes, and sighing heavily from time to time. My heart wept with her; I longed to take her in my arms and kiss the tears away. She was unlike anybody else in the world, I thought, nobler at once and weaker. And so I tried to tell her as I said good-night, bowing low before her and kissing her hand with a strange mixture of tenderness and veneration. She understood my tacit sympathy, for as I lifted my head she took it in her hands and kissed me on the forehead before them all. I went out of the carriage trembling with emotion, prouder and happier than I had ever been in my life.

As the hours passed, however, my old self, that had been crushed and silenced by the whirlwind of her passion, slowly rose again, and soon convinced me that Sonia was wrong, altogether wrong. I determined to persuade her that she was mistaken, to show her that what had been, must be; for the one unchangeable thing in the world is the nature of man, and that determines all his institutions. If the institutions are bad it is because of a corresponding vileness in mankind. One had as much right to complain of the top hat as of a king, both answered to some idiotic desire in man, or they would not exist—

We passed through Petersburg at night: it was quite eleven o'clock before we reached the little station four miles from their country house. We got to our journey's end in complete darkness, and I could see nothing but a long, low building. What I noticed this first night was the obsequious yet

boisterous affection of a host of servants, male and female.

In the morning I saw the place better. Sonia, the gay Sonia, the Sonia I had known for one or two days in Vienna, had come to life again; she knocked at my door before I was half dressed, and cried to me to hurry down, for she wanted to show me everything.

How I wish I could paint her as I found her, framed in the French window against the dazzling sunshine of that summer morning. Always striking in appearance, she yet varied more in looks than most women; she was often almost plain, but now and then her beauty struck me as pure witchery, and this happened to be one of her rare days. She always parted her hair at the side like a boy, which gave a strange alert look to her face. And this look was quickened and deepened now by the incomparable warmth of her eyes into an expression so soulful and courageous that I only wanted to love and kiss her. Her dress always seemed to be perfectly simple and careless. I have been told that such dresses are the most costly, but I don't think that was true in her case. They often fitted badly, but the rounded grace of her figure was not to be disguised by a crease or a fold. The moment I came into the room she held out both hands to me, and then taking my arm whirled me out of doors. I was to see everything, and at once.

"But first you must know," she began breathlessly, "that this house was built a long time ago. In 1730 or '40 my great-grandfather, who had spent some years at the French court, came back

to live here. He had forgotten his Russian, and had to curse the servants in French. Three-quarters of the house was in existence before his time; but he determined to level it with the ground and build a palace here after the fashion of Versailles. He had the best intentions, the dear man! But the first thing was to have an avenue of trees, for trees take time to grow, so the trees must come first he thought. The house, you see faces north. My great-grandfather thought a house should face south; he therefore began to construct his avenue of trees from the kitchen door, meaning when he rebuilt the house to make the entrance there. Come, I will show it you," and she swept me off round the house to a superb avenue of trees, which did indeed begin opposite the kitchen door, on the further side of the great unpaved dirty yard. "Come along," she said, and we walked rapidly down the avenue of alternate chestnut and acacia trees for more than half a mile. Some distance from the house the ground dropped suddenly, and when we got to the slope Sonia pointed out to me that the avenue ended in a swamp.

"Yes," she cried, laughing merrily, "my great-grandfather thought nothing of the swamp; when he came upon it he determined to drain it, and he set to work. You shall come and see the little summer-house in it that I built in memory of the great André; for I have a sneaking regard—in spite of your wise counsels—for my half-mad great-grandfather, who would make avenues and drain swamps and build a Versailles here in the

wilds. I see what you are thinking, sir," she went on, nodding her head with childish gaiety. "You are thinking that I like my great-grandfather because I am like him. It is perhaps true, you sober Englishman; but is not the avenue beautiful, though it is of no use and does not serve any purpose of parade? I love my avenue better because it is like no other avenue in the world. Here the trees grow and flower all by themselves, content to fill the air with perfume and take the eye with beauty. They would be covered with dust if we drove up and down between them. My grandfather's ideas of perfection have a good deal to say for themselves even in this world." And she looked at me with those strange luminous eyes as if she had half divined my mental attitude.

I am glad to say that for the moment I did not feel inclined to argue, but replied merrily, "I think your great-grandfather a wonderful person, and his avenue quite beautiful. I suppose he meant to continue it to the high road?"

"Four versts off," she nodded gravely, "and he did too, but the swamp in the middle of it would not be drained, and there is about a hundred yards of road made at the end of the avenue to run into the main road, and that's all. You see," she said laughing, "French ideas could not survive in Russia; dear, lazy, happy-go-lucky Russia wouldn't have a Versailles and so my grandfather died before he had half carried out his plans." After a pause she added, in a lower tone, "Untamed and untamable Russia wasn't to learn French ways. Perhaps," she continued gravely, "it will show

itself just as rebellious to English ideas and English ways."

But I would not be drawn. She was too perfect as she was; the day was too bright; I was too pleased to find her in such a happy mood to disturb it with arguments; so I laughed at her and with her, and we took our way back to the house and breakfast arm in arm.

But somewhere in the depths of me there was a desire to refute her arguments and convert her, and sooner or later I was bound to speak. We were in the little summer-house, I remember, one afternoon with the swaying willow branches in front of us, when I began:

"I wonder, Sonia, if you would let me try to show you why I do not agree with your views about society and its reformation."

She turned to me with positive fear in her face, and clasping her hands on the table cried: "Oh, don't!" but a moment afterwards she added:

"I knew it would come to speech. I knew it would. What a pity!"

"What do you mean?" I asked in surprise.

"Oh," she replied abruptly, "do you think we need to speak in order to be understood? I think we often feel things more clearly than words can render them. I knew your thoughts. I felt the antagonism in you all the while. Besides you have a way of your own of talking, my friend. When you hear something you don't like, your brows go up, your jaws set, and your eyes flash; I'm not blind. But go on," she added, "I will listen. I

sometimes wish I could be persuaded," she concluded wistfully.

I was discouraged at the outset. I felt that the attempt would make me lose ground with her, but it seemed to me merely honest to go on —a sort of duty to her and myself—so I did my best.

"You think institutions can be altered," I began, "because they don't suit you, don't accord with your ideas of right and justice and goodness. But institutions are there because men are what they are. The institutions are not made to suit you, Sonia, an extraordinary woman, but the average man, and they do suit him fairly well or he would alter them."

She did not reply, but I could see that she was listening. I went on in the same strain for some time; she heard me out in silence, and then replied in a gentle, hopeless, tolerant way:

"I think you answer yourself," she began. "You are still half a Christian, aren't you? Well, has not Jesus altered the world? Is he not altering men still? making them ashamed of their brutal passions and brutish selfishness. Surely, my friend, you must see that you are on the wrong side, on the side of immobility, while I am on the side of progress. Men linger on the upward path to satisfy their baser appetites. You should not defend that."

I was not persuaded. "If man climbs fast," I began, "he falls back again. We English tried to go fast with Cromwell and fell back with Charles II. You would put a Cromwell out of breath. If

we were to adopt your rate of progress we should need a Christ in every street."

"Even that does not seem impossible to me," she cried, starting to her feet and beginning to pace backwards and forwards as if she needed a physical outlet for her emotion: "Nothing is impossible: there are no limits to what the soul may do. . . . You talk of a Christ in every street; but you have forgotten that there is a woman in every house. Look what we have already done for the humanization and refinement of man, and what we are still doing. He is ashamed now to be dissolute and drunken; he will soon be ashamed of greed and self-seeking. Woman is gradually moulding man to her ideal! For ages she has done it unconsciously, now that she is beginning to do it consciously the progress will be more rapid than you can imagine."

"Just as Russia is a new factor in the problem," she went on, after a pause, "so is woman. She is bound by no traditions; it is for her to make her own traditions. The women of to-day have to set the example; they will find followers! It was Jeanne d'Arc that made Charlotte Corday possible."

She had got into her habitual train of thought, and now she talked with a passion of spiritual exaltation that thrilled me in spite of myself.

"How men miss-see their saviours! No one has written a real life of Charlotte Corday, and yet she was the first of the great modern women, greater, I think, even than Jeanne d'Arc, for she had no faith to sustain her, only her own great heart. Don't

you know what she said about her deed when the Public Prosecutor tried to make out that she was the assassin of a great and good man? 'I have killed him,' she said, 'and he is dead. You cannot kill great men.' And she was right; she had killed him. After his death they started Marat hats in Paris, and Marat this and Marat that, but the vile worship could not last. Within the year his body was taken from the grave and tossed in dust to the winds! Charlotte Corday had killed him; he was dead."

There were tears in her voice and eyes as she spoke. It was all so real to her that I answered her half afraid:

"Surely you would not do evil—and such evil—that good might come."

She stopped with a great sigh and sat down at the table, shaking her head as if in utter hopelessness. I had to repeat my question; and then she replied slowly—half-wearily:

"Do you ask that seriously? What a creature of convention you are! What a load you carry about with you of outworn moral platitudes! Would you take one life to save ten thousand? That's the question. I would. I would—gladly."

"You must not speak like that, dear," I said, putting my hand on her clasped hands.

She turned and looked at me with a great, glad resolve in her eyes that shocked me. A moment or two afterwards she said, "Let us go into the air," and by a sort of unconscious agreement we began to talk of ordinary things. I made up my mind not to excite her again if I could help it; opposi-

tion seemed only to confirm her in her wild, impracticable enthusiasms.

For days and days my purpose of self-repression held, and indeed the next serious talk that we had was wholly different. I had been noticing the way she waited on her brother, and her pleasure in the service. She tried to amuse him and interest him at home; she evidently dreaded the life of the capital for him. In fact, she told me once that she only stayed in the country house for Andrushka and because it suited her mother's health. Self-abnegation sat lightly on her; she seemed to take delight in it; I could not help telling her one morning how much I admired her for this.

"Oh," she cried, blushing, "don't praise me for unselfishness nor set me on a pedestal for anything! I am not worthy of it. I have had terrible fights with myself; to make myself decent at all was hard. As a child I was a wretched little animal.

"You perhaps ought to know something," she went on; "at any rate, it will put you right about me, and take some of the dirty conceit out of me. As a child I was a sort of unconscious liar," and she flushed again. "I used to romance, say I had met people, and that they had said things to me, and my mother and André used to believe me, which encouraged me to go on. Of course, as I grew older I became a little ashamed of myself for this and tried to stop it, but it was very hard to break it off. I was always romancing, and once or twice I got caught or half caught, and nearly died of shame. But the world of my fancy was always

as vivid to me as the real world, so I went on lying for years and years. Then I met that man I told you of, Michailoff. He first gave me faith in myself, faith that I could do something worth the doing, that I was one——" and again she flushed. "He taught me a great deal, too. I owe him much. Of course, I began to make a hero of him, began to care for him, and then found out that he was base—a brute, and a liar. He was making up to one I had thought my friend, Hetty Helfmann, all the time he was telling me that I was the only woman in the world for him. A liar! But it was the faith he had given me in myself that made me hate my lying, so I made up my mind to say every sentence over to myself and see whether it was true, before I uttered it. That makes my speech slow very often, even now. Ah, you have noticed it," she cried, looking at me.

"I have noticed the abruptness of speech," I answered, "and the pauses, without understanding the reason. It always seems to me that you ought to speak very quickly."

"I used to," she went on; "lies come quickly off the tongue; it is the exact truth that is slow. I often exaggerate still. But that does not matter now; nothing matters now. Besides," she began, as if falling into a new train of thought, "I have not the vestige of a desire now to deceive any one in the world. . . . But I must go down to the village. No, you cannot come with me; it would only hurt them," and off she started on some mission of kindness.

Our next talk was about this village and the

poor in it. Her mother had said at luncheon that it was silly to waste money on the villagers; for there was no gratitude in them.

"I don't do it for a reward, mother," Sonia replied.

"Why do you do it?" I asked curiously.

"To appease my sympathy, I think," she said, "and because they need it."

"Need it indeed!" sniffed the mother. "What nonsense!"

"The whole dispute, mother, was about the laundress and what you paid her. I said that her prices were very cheap, for by rights she should be paid what you would give, rather than do the work yourself. But you only give what competition, that is, the necessities of the poor, compel them to accept. I say that is as much theft as any other robbery by force. We are worse than thieves, too, for we rob without running any risk. I am sick of it all—the poor degraded by poverty and the rich debased by luxury and power."

"Yet One said that the poor would always be with us," I interjected.

She turned on me at once. "I don't think the poor suffered when He was with them."

"Oh, I am so glad, Mr. Lascelles," said the mother, "that you are taking her to task. She keeps the whole village; it is absurd. And look how she is dressed—ridiculous! she owes it to her position and name to be properly dressed. But no! she would rather play Lady Bountiful to a pack of cunning ne'er-do-weels."

While the mother was speaking, a verse that I

read at Oxford came into my head, the verse of a woman poet:

"They shall take all to buy them bread; take all I have to give.
I, if I perish, perish; they to-day shall eat and live."

The feeling of Christina Rossetti was the same as that of Sonia; but something in me that I thought was reason, fought against the emotion and I used my knowledge against my sympathy. I don't know why I did it; I was warned by the look in Sonia's face, but I could not refrain from adding something that I thought effective to my argument of the day before.

"It is curious," I said, "how every spiritual movement has its drawbacks. The Crusades were due to a wave of spiritual enthusiasm, and the Crusaders brought back with them to Europe the vilest disease known to our civilization. Curious, too, how material progress is bound up with spiritual advancement; men accumulate wealth, and art immediately comes to humanize them."

"Pure scepticism—all that," replied Sonia sharply. "Scepticism that has never done anything good in the world. It merely lames right action; it should be called the devil's advocate. You are always on the wrong side, my friend."

I was wounded by the coldness in her voice, and so I persisted:

"After all," I said, "it is not scepticism but plain truth that our social laws—payments, punishments and the rest—are merely the outcome of the forces, the men and women who make up the

community. The height of a pyramid must bear a proportion to the breadth of the base, and the base must always rest on the ground—in the mud."

"It is false," Sonia cried, starting up and speaking with astonishing vehemence. "False and vile. You make life mechanical. You crush the soul. How can you take that side? I can't endure it," and she left the room.

"Don't mind, Mr. Lascelles," said the mother soothingly, "she will get over her tantrums soon."

"That's just like Sonia," said André. "She keeps us all here for our health, eh, mother? but I believe it is because she likes to play queen to those cursed villagers. I'm sick of the place," and he yawned.

As soon as I decently could, I went after Sonia, whom I found in the avenue. I walked with her, but as soon as I began to speak, she cried:

"No more arguments, my friend, no more arguments. You are you, and I am I. In either case the tree has got to its full height now and cannot be bent or altered. Words have no effect on our natures. Character is not to be changed by a little breath. It was folly to think that."

"No, no," she went on, preventing me from speaking, "I will not hear you again. I understand now. Your English view of life is Chinese. You accept what you call 'facts'—the lower the better. Your society is all mechanical, caged in conventions; you excuse your selfishness by talking of necessity—'things are because they must be'

—and you choke us with 'what is, shall be.' I will not have it. I don't believe it. The world to me is fluid, men and women malleable—everything noble is possible."

"But think," I cried, "you contradict yourself. You have just argued that character is stable, and cannot be altered by mere arguments. Now you say we are infinitely malleable."

"What do I care for contradictions?" she replied impatiently. "I see both sides of the shield, that is all. But in the main I am against you, against you heart and soul. I think nobly of men and you think ignobly of them. Each time that I talk with you I go away with my soul fainting and weak. Yes, I must say it. I know that if I married you and went to England, I should live a life of ease and comfort, and at every turn my woman's vanity would be tickled and pleased. I should be made much of and everything would go well with me. You care for me too and are kind and good. But the soul in me would die. I should pass my life ignobly, and—God help me—perhaps I should get to love my prison of scented cotton wool. That frightens me. The soul in me would die there, I tell you—the enthusiasm and the resolution—and I live for them and for nothing else. I would rather suffer a thousand deaths than give up my beliefs; they redeem me to myself." And she turned from me and walked quickly into the house.

As she went, fear fell upon me, abject fear. I had lost her. What a fool and brute I was! I had spoken against my feelings too; she was right,

and again the line came back and sang itself in my ears:

"I, if I perish, perish; they to-day shall eat and live."

Almost I resolved to seek her out and tell her that there should be no more controversy, no more disagreement between us, that I would work with her. But something masculine in me rebelled against this as weakness; and reason—or perhaps dialectic—began to furnish me with arguments against her. There could be no doubt that in the main the poor were incapable and wastrels and the well-to-do industrious and provident—that was the truth to anchor to. . . .

I spent the whole day and nearly the whole night fighting with myself, heart against head, and only won rest by persuading myself that Sonia couldn't give me up. The fear that she might do so was baseless, I argued; I had never heard nor read of such abandonment for a mere idea.

But next day I had difficulty in finding her. She avoided me. When I asked after her I was told by the servant with uplifted hands and eyebrows, that she was probably locked in her room, that nobody could find her. I was conscious that these were only excuses, but consoled myself with the idea that I should see her at the midday meal and then get a chance to talk to her. The hours went by on feet of lead. At last the bell rang for lunch. I was more than disappointed—I was heart-sick with fear, when I saw that she was not in her place and that no one seemed to notice her absence. I asked after her and was told that she

had probably eaten in her room. André was almost certain that he had seen her going out walking as he came down to dinner. Immediately the meal was over, I went among the outdoor servants and found this was true; Sonia had gone out by herself and might be away the whole day, they said.

All that afternoon I spent wandering about the house—like a dog without its master, as I thought to myself bitterly—waiting, looking, longing for the form that never came; and all the while my fear grew, the fear of irreparable loss.

The long summer day dragged to its end; the rose lights faded out of the sky; the gathering shadows chilled me. It was ten o'clock before I saw her coming up the avenue; and, strange to say, as soon as I saw her, my fears fled and a sort of irritation and anger took their place. How could she hurt me so? I would not go to meet her; I would stand and let her come to me. She was in the wrong, not I. But when she saw me,—and she did not see me till she was within twenty yards of me, for I was in the shadow of the trees—she stopped too, and for a moment made as if she would leave the avenue and go into the house by the side door through the orchard. That hurt me inexpressibly, and with the pain my fears came back on me with a rush; all the irritation vanished and I went quickly to her with a reproachful:

"Sonia, I have waited all day for you."

When I saw her face, I was tenfold more pitiful. It was pale and drawn with great violet rings round the eyes; she had evidently been crying.

"Oh," I went on hurriedly, "Sonia, what have

I done? Let us love each other and think of nothing else. It is too terrible to be parted from you." As she nodded slowly, I took her in my arms. I was glad she did not speak. I went on talking to comfort her, telling her how I had waited and longed for her and how glad I was to see her; but I suddenly noticed that although she was very gentle and let her hand rest in mine, she was walking steadily to the house, and when I tried to restrain her, she looked up at me with the brave eyes and said quietly:

"I am worn out, George; I must rest."

"Of course, of course," I said, again walking on by her side. "But you will see me to-morrow, won't you? I want to be with you." I would not even say that I wanted to talk to her for fear of alarming her, and she bowed her head in agreement. As we came to the house, I kissed her hand:

"Good-night, Sonia." She seemed to bend her head just a little as she passed through the door.

To describe the conflict of my feelings that night would be impossible to me. As is usual I fear in such cases, I began by blaming myself, and as her influence on me faded I ended by blaming Sonia. After all she was unreasonable; the poor *were* the wastrels and the rich *were* the efficient. Of course, there were exceptions, numberless exceptions, but that was the rule and the rule made for progress, for right. I would not disguise my convictions on that point; it would be treason to my intelligence. But then all my resolution was shaken by the memory of her pitiful, pale face, and I resolved to be as sweet to her as I could be, to make every-

thing easy to her; for I loved her and I had no doubt in spite of what had passed that she loved me. And loving each other I felt sure that all would come right—in time.

I did not see her in the forenoon, but word was brought to me from her about eleven o'clock that she would be down to lunch and would see me in the afternoon. After lunch we went out and, by some unconscious agreement, walked round the house and down the avenue to the summer-house in the swamp, Sonia's favourite place. She seemed very quiet, unnaturally quiet. That brought back my fears, and the conflict going on within me, the old conflict between my head and my heart, confused me; but when we were seated in the summer-house and the brave sad eyes looked at me, I knew what to say—the truth. I would tell her the simple truth. And I did, and she listened to me to the end without a word; only when I told her how I had doubted her love, she stroked my head with her hand pitifully. Helped by that cue I dwelt on my love for her and her love for me. I could not help saying at the end:

"If I lost you, Sonia, now, I should go mad, I think. I know I should not care for anything else in the world or be worth anything; I should be given over to the devil."

At once her brows knit and her face grew cold.

"You must not talk like that," she said, "it is not true, I am sure."

"But you see what I mean," I cried, shifting my ground quickly. "In heart I am with you altogether, and my brain sympathizes with much

that you say. Give me a little time. Whatever you wish to do for the poor shall be done, whatever you wish to give to them, shall be given. Together we will fight every abuse, every injustice. I will try to live as you would have me live; but you must not speak of leaving me; that hardens me, brings out all the worst in me."

She shook her head slowly. "Oh, my friend," she said, and there was infinite tenderness and regret in her voice, "the trouble is deeper, far deeper. Don't let us deceive ourselves. You are an Englishman and I am a Russian—that's the real difficulty. You could only be happy and strong and at your best in England, and I cannot give up Russia. Look," and she spoke hurriedly, "before I met you I was bound to her in a hundred ways, by a hundred ties. Over there in Petersburg there are men and women who need me and I have promised myself to them. I cannot draw back now."

"But how would our love and marriage interfere with that?" I asked, with a terrible sinking at heart, a terrible dread.

"What right," she answered, "have I to sacrifice you? None; I should ruin your life, blast it. By what right?"

"By the right," I broke in, "that I wish it, that I am eager to give it."

She put her hand on my mouth. "Hush, hush," she said. "I am not willing. I could not work with you beside me. My own life is mine to break and throw away as I please; but yours—oh, I could do nothing if you were there. I should be

a coward for you, and I shall need all my courage."

"What do you mean?" I asked harshly, feeling myself grow pale with anger. In some way or other I was certain then that her resolution was irrevocable. "I offer to share your life whatever it may be. You tell me that you will not accept my companionship. Then you don't love me. If you loved me, you could not speak like that."

"Ah," she cried wildly, "why do you tempt me and torture me?" And with a supreme effort at self-control, she rose and came over to me, and I drew her down on my knee and she laid her head beside mine.

"Don't say such things," she said to me. "You mustn't even think them. I love you too well," she whispered, "I love to put my face against yours. Hush, don't look," she went on, holding my head, for I tried to draw away from her to look at her. "If you look I can't tell you. But when you touch me, George, when our hands meet just by chance, I thrill from head to foot; all my body cries for you. Ah, God, if I did not love you, how easy it would all be! How easy it would be to part from you and never see you again and go on with my work. But now it is hard, so hard," and her voice had a pitiful break in it. "It is worse than death to leave you; but I must, I must.—My work calls me, my work——"

She put my head from her resolutely and stood up with her hands in front of her face, and as she shook the tears away, she walked out of the hut. I sat and saw her go. What was there to say? I

felt an immovable resolution in her, and I was exhausted with the strain. There I sat in the hut with my dead hopes about me, my heart aching and my brain numb. I could feel nothing, could not think; but the verse sang itself in my ears with a sort of insane exaltation:

"I, if I perish, perish; in the name of God I go."

How long I stayed in the hut I don't know. I left it like a wounded animal, with one fear in me —that I should go mad, with one wish—to tire my body to a rag and then sleep. I walked for hours, driving myself on whenever I noticed that my pace slackened, and yet with some unconscious purpose of making a round and getting back to the house at last. It was after midnight when I returned. The short summer night was quickening to the dawn and I was glad of it; it had been a terrible day; I was glad to have done with it, glad.

When I awoke I felt perfectly refreshed and curiously composed and contented. There was a little dull pain about my heart I noticed, but that would go off, I thought, with delight, and I pulled the curtains back and threw the window up and stretched myself in the sunlight. I even went so far as to jest with myself; if Sonia did not care for me, perhaps some one else would, and if no one would, a state of single-blessedness was not so bad, after all. There was nothing to be gained by crying over spilt milk and inscrutable women. As I got out of my tub, I whistled. The cold water had done me good, brought me back completely to the realities of existence. There is sun-

shine in life, I said, and rubbed myself hard. Nothing like exercise, sleep and a cold bath for us English, I exulted: so we chase away fevered dreams and despairs. I dressed quickly. But when I had dressed, the thought of meeting Sonia came to me with a shock of fear that almost unnerved me. My mind was made up, however, and in a moment I had regained self-control and passed resolutely down-stairs. There was no one in the sitting-room, so I went out into the orchard. I would not go back to the avenue. No, I would walk about under the trees, and not think at all but enjoy the sunshine and the song of birds. There, an hour later, a servant found me; he brought me a letter. As I opened it, I felt my heart turn to water; I knew it was from Sonia; it was very short.

"Dear One," it began, "It would be better for us not to meet again for some time. I am suffering so much that I must beg you to give me time and solitude to let me come to myself; I could not meet you now. You will go to Petersburg, I know, to-day, and later perhaps we may meet calmly.

"She who loves you. "SONIA."

I folded the letter up again and smiled at the messenger like a mandarin, and wondered as I walked away under the trees why I did not fall; for sky and earth were whirling round me, and I could have screamed with the pain. In a few moments I came to reason. So this was my dismissal; curt enough, and complete enough. Rage came

into me; I turned and walked hastily to the house; and in ten minutes I had packed my things. Then I sat down to write to her.

"Your wishes shall be followed, Sonia." I wrote; but I could not close the letter there as I wanted to; my heart would not let me; in spite of myself I added, "But I rely on your promise that we shall meet again. I shall be at the —— Hotel."

I signed it boldly, "Your lover, George Lascelles."

It suddenly came to me that I could not meet her mother and brother without betraying myself. I would write to them, too; and I wrote hinting clearly to the mother that it was Sonia's will that I should go at once and not mine, and giving my address very carefully at the —— Hotel in Petersburg, as I had given it to Sonia. To the brother I wrote still more briefly, thanking him for his kindness to me, and hoping that he would let me see him when he came to town.

In the afternoon of that day I was in Petersburg. I immediately dressed myself for dinner and went off to the Embassy. I must hunt up one of our fellows there, I thought; I could not dine by myself: my memories were terrible company. I dined with Green, the Green who has since made a name for himself in diplomacy, and a jolly good dinner we had, I remember. I enjoyed everything at the Restaurant Français, the careful service, the excellent food, and the undeniable champagne. I had said to myself that I wouldn't think, and I didn't; I simply chattered

to Green and listened to his chatter, and did myself right well.

Looking back, as I am now doing, it seems to me that the most curious point in my mental condition at this time was the fact that at first I did not suffer. On the contrary, I felt a sense of relief, and this relief was not chiefly due to the merging of anxiety into certainty, but was positive and substantial. For days and days I was like a schoolboy just released from school. I can only explain this feeling by comparing Sonia's exaltation of mind to living high up a mountain-side where the air is thin and mere breathing an exertion. I had been mentally on the strain for weeks, and now that the tension was over I went back with delight to the old easeful way of life. This relaxation had one consequence which at the moment I did not think of, but which in the long run became of the greatest importance. When I left—I meant to write to Sonia within the week. At the back of my mind, indeed, I intended to write to her frequently; but the people at the Embassy were extremely kind to me; the old life, with its calls, dinners, and parties, very engrossing, and so I put off writing. At the end of a fortnight it was harder to write than at the end of the week, because I should have had to excuse or explain my silence, and I did not feel inclined to invent lies. There was a little pique at the bottom of me, I suppose towards Sonia, which strengthened my disinclination to write; she had thrown me over, and my paltry vanity took pleasure in sulking. For three or four weeks I went on comfort-

ably enough. But as soon as my mind had rested and my spirits had regained their tone, the society I was moving in, began to pall upon me; the women seemed to me silly and frivolous, the men bored me. How was it, I asked myself, that before Sonia took off the German *Frauen*, I had never noticed how like women were to hens? They strutted about and made little noises exactly like hens; their faces, too, had some strange family likeness to the faces of hens, and their voices and manners reminded me of a farmyard. Again and again I burst out laughing at some unholy resemblance of this sort, and my merriment was sometimes difficult to account for.

As mixed society grew more and more tedious to me, I withdrew from it and began to give men's dinners. But soon the men, too, struck me as affected and painfully dull; their conversation was as matter-of-fact as the intercourse of animals, and I felt rising in me a sense of contempt and indignation which I had never felt before and which I had no right to feel, I who a few months before would have condemned intellectual conversation as bad form, a sort of showing off. In sheer disgust at the tedium of my fellows I withdrew from society altogether, and began to live entirely alone. I worked a little at Russian, but found the days drag. In the slow, heavy hours of solitude Sonia's face came back to me, and the sense of my loss grew to pain, a pain of every moment, an aching desire that increased in intensity, and seemed at length to change the very nature of my mind. Instead of condemning Sonia I began to condemn

myself, and at length I could only escape from misery by putting Sonia on a pedestal as one of the most extraordinary women in the world, and so excusing in part my own stupid resistance to her influence. For now I saw clearly that she had been right and that I had been mistaken, that the cause of progress and reform was the only cause for a man to defend, and that I had sinned against the light in trying to damp her enthusiasm. I took a pleasure now in going into the poorer districts of Petersburg and helping poverty here and there, as I thought Sonia would have liked me to do. The destitution and misery I found on every side strengthened my newborn feelings and brought me more and more into sympathy with Sonia's revolt. Indeed, so close did I come to her in sympathy that one day I sat down and wrote her a long letter, setting forth much of what I have put down here, but particularly dwelling on the change in me, my conversion, I called it; and in truth it was a conversion, for never again was I able to think the old individualistic thoughts or to live the old life entirely devoted to selfish enjoyment. I sent the letter to their country house. It was André who told me to send it there. From time to time I still came across him in the fashionable quarter. He could never tell me where his sister was or what she was doing; or, perhaps, he would not tell me, though I am inclined to think he could not, for he did not appear to take the slightest interest in what she was doing or where she was staying.

"She is always about with dirty workmen," he

said, "or with women whose hair has been cut short and who look like ill-dressed boys. I can't stand the set. She'll get herself locked up, if she doesn't look out."

And so he went his way, burning his little bit of candle at both ends.

After waiting a fortnight or so, I got an answer from Sonia. The letter was lying on my table one afternoon when I came in. How hungrily I read the address, how I played with my delight! I would not open the letter, I would touch it just where her hand had touched it, and I ended by kissing it again and again in a wild rapture. Her mere influence transports one beyond reason, I thought with a smile. At length I tore the envelope open and read:

"Your letter made me glad for you and sorry for our fate. It will be better for us not to meet yet.

"Yours in all sympathy and affection,

"SONIA."

After writing as I had written, I must have felt sure that she would give me a meeting, for her letter was a terrible disappointment. For some days everything was weary, flat and unprofitable to me; and then I began to work again at my Russian in the morning, and in the afternoon to go out among the poor.

One of the first days I went out I had rather a curious adventure. In a workman's restaurant where I sometimes dined, I found a pretty and

rather well-dressed girl of Jewish type seated almost opposite my accustomed place. She spoke to me first, I think, but I really paid so little attention to the matter that I could not be sure. She was pretty, very pretty, in a sort of rich sensuous way, but she did not appeal to me. She seemed affected and a little common; but she evidently knew the poor and the poorer districts of Petersburg intimately, and I could not help admitting that she was not only well educated but well read. Almost at the beginning of our conversation, I remember, the talk fell on Turgenieff's "Fathers and Sons" and his extraordinary picture of Bazarov, the Nihilist. But the girl would not accept Bazarov as a representative of the Reform movement in Russia, and her criticism had something in it.

"Bazarov," she said, "is a hard, selfish brute, while the very essence of the Reform movement is unselfish devotion to others. If you only knew some of the real leaders of reform—Bakounine's nephew, for instance, or Michailoff, they are Nihilists if you like."

I pricked up my ears at the name. "Ah," I said, "tell me about Michailoff, will you? Do you know him well?"

She cast her eyes down in a little confusion that seemed to me chiefly pretence, as I asked her whether she knew Michailoff; but in a moment she regained her self-possession and said demurely:

"At one time I knew him very well. He is an extraordinary man and devoted to the cause. You ought to meet him."

"I should like to," I replied coldly. "But cannot you tell me about him, what he does, how he shows his devotion?"

"He was left fairly well-off, you know," she began, "his father was a shopkeeper, I think, in Little Russia; but he lives just like a workman, allows himself only ten roubles a week and gives all the rest to the Nihilist propaganda. He is sure to be arrested one of these days."

This last phrase convinced me that she knew Michailoff better than she wished to appear to know him. I was right; she tried again and again to find out from me where I had heard of him and why I took an interest in him; but her whole being was common and insincere and I told her nothing.

I did not return to the restaurant for a fortnight; but when I went back again, I found her in the same place as before. That gave me pause, made me vaguely suspicious and put me on my guard with her. She seemed over-dressed now and coarser than ever, but she met me with a great show of frankness.

"I must introduce myself," she said, almost as soon as I sat down. "My name is Hetty Helfmann." I bowed and told her my name.

"I remembered what you said," she began, "about wishing to meet some of the real leaders of the revolutionary party, but they naturally avoid strangers, and Michailoff is so taken up with his new flame that I could not get him to promise to give us even an hour of his valuable time."

"Indeed," I replied coldly; but she went on, with affected carelessness:

"It is Sonia this and Sonia that with him now. He can talk of nothing else." And her eyes searched me as she spoke.

I felt myself flushing; but if I could not control my blood, I could my tongue, and I did not give her the satisfaction of asking a single question about Sonia. I would not bring her name again on those lips. I was put to it to turn the conversation, but found the easiest way was to talk to Miss Helfmann about herself; and so I began with awkward directness to praise her hat and dress, knowing, with my new-born insight into women—insight that was half contempt—that she would take a compliment to her hat as if it were paid to herself. She was delighted, and kept asking for more sweets, like a greedy child. I gave them to her till I thought her appetite for flattery should be satisfied, and then got up and regretted that I'd have to go away. She tried in vain to keep me, and when I persisted that I had an appointment, she betrayed herself:

"By the way, I forgot," she said, "I wanted to tell you that Michailoff is always to be found now, at the afternoon meetings, in a house in —— Street. His new mistress goes there, too, I believe; she is thinner than ever, and dresses down to Michailoff's taste."

I put on an affectation of interest as if I were trying to seem interested and was not, and went away with the sound of her malicious laughter in my ears. She had evidently given the address in order that I might go to one of the meetings—probably with the hope that I might turn out to

be a closer friend of Sonia's than Michailoff would like.

I found myself saying, "She would stop at nothing, that woman, nothing!" and I made up my mind to warn Sonia. But then her last letter came into my mind, and in the light of what the cursed Jewess had said I began to think she no longer cared for me. Of course, the Jewess's story was all lies; Sonia was not Michailoff's mistress; but it was strange that she should meet him, after speaking of him as base and a liar. She went on meeting him, too; I was sure the Jewess had told me the truth in this particular; for, by giving me the time and the place of the meeting, she had given me the power of verifying her story. The poison got into my blood and worked there—Sonia and Michailoff together every afternoon; Sonia, who would not meet me, who would not take the trouble to write me more than two or three lines. Strange, too, how she knew that private room in the Vienna restaurant. Was I doing her wrong by the suspicion? Perhaps. Perhaps not, too. What did I know about her, after all? One thing was certain; she was with Michailoff every afternoon. I did not write to warn her. I put it off.

Those meetings of mine with the Jewess must have taken place in October, for it was December and the terrible northern winter had laid icy hands on the city before anything else happened to me of note. By this time I had got to understand Russian and to speak it a little, and I used to move about with much greater freedom than heretofore.

One afternoon I had been in the poorer quarters and was hurrying back to the hotel, for it had begun to snow, when I saw a figure moving before me that I could not mistake even in the gloom. It set all my pulses throbbing; it was Sonia, I felt sure. I walked a little more rapidly and drew up to within fifteen or twenty yards of her and was certain; no one else moved like that. At the sight my anger and suspicion melted away. For some reason or other I was conscious that the story told of her, and my suspicions of her were alike unworthy and false. I was surprised to find how glad I was to see her, how much I wanted to speak to her, to meet her once again, to take measure of the distance she and I had travelled since the summer; and I quickened my pace. Suddenly I thought, "if I speak to her in the street, she may choke me off," and then the thought of the "meeting" came to me and at once it seemed the better plan to follow her to the "meeting," for then I should see her for perhaps half an hour and certainly have a talk with her at the end.

We carry, I notice, the mental atmosphere of our home with us wherever we go. A "meeting" the Jewess had said, and the impression left on my mind was that of a political meeting such as might take place among Radicals in England. If I had exercised my thought upon the matter consciously I should have known that this was not the case; but I did not like to think about it, and so the word took its meaning from the associations of my past.

Sonia walked on rapidly without looking behind

her, and it was with a shock that I found myself passing by the side of the Fortress Peter and Paul and then turning into a narrow street behind it. Evidently the Jewess had given me the right address. In a minute or two more Sonia entered a house with just a nod to the police watchman at the door. I followed within half-a-dozen yards of her. The man started up as if to stop me; but I had quickened my pace to overtake Sonia, and I suppose the intention to speak to her was already in my face, for he let me pass without a word. On the second landing I was at her heels. Her name was almost on my lips when she opened a door and went into a room; before she could close the door I had passed in after her, saying "Sonia."

She turned and saw me, but before she spoke, before she turned, I had time to realise that the meeting was not such a meeting as I had unconsciously expected. The room was a large one, almost destitute of furniture; there was no ikon in it, I noticed, and the stove had evidently only been lit a short time; for they still kept the door of it open to get a draught and some of the smoke had blown through the room and made it look particularly comfortless. But what surprised me was that the room had fifteen or twenty men in it and no women at all, and it was evident at first glance that these men were of a better class than their clothes would lead one to believe. Some were dressed like common workmen, others like artisans, others again like poor clerks, but one look at their faces showed that many of them were masquerading.

As Sonia entered the room, a man detached himself from the group and came towards her. I put him down at once in my mind as Michailoff—a man about thirty-five, of medium height, with small golden-brown moustache. He was very good-looking—distinguished-looking even—in spite of his clothes.

As Sonia turned to me, she cried in wonder, "You here! Did you follow me?" The emphasis she laid on the word "follow" made me flush hotly.

"I did," I replied. The astonishment visible in the men's faces, and the angry surprise of Michailoff prevented me showing the embarrassment I felt and gave me self-control. "I did," I repeated; "but your friends," and I pointed to the circle, "do not seem pleased to see me." I would let them understand, at any rate, that I was not desirous of conciliating them.

"This is no place for you," she said hurriedly. "You should not have come here. You must go away at once."

"Not at once, surely," said Michailoff, coming forward and speaking in Russian. "We must know who the gentleman is and how he found his way here."

Sonia answered him in Russian shortly:

"I will be responsible for him;" and then turning to me she said in French:

"But now you must go at once."

"I understood what your friend said," I remarked quietly, "and also what you answered; but I do not see why you should make yourself respon-

sible for me. I saw you walking before me, I followed you at a short distance, surely there is no crime in that." I spoke in Russian so that they might all understand. I wanted to defy them all—all these men who met Sonia every day and could be with her hour after hour when she would not give me five minutes. I suppose she felt the antagonism between me and the others, for she simply said to them:

"I will be back immediately," then took me by the arm, saying, "Come with me," and drew me outside the door.

We were alone together, and the outside world fell away from me. Later I knew that as soon as the door closed upon us there arose inside the room a hubbub of indistinguishable voices; but at the moment I was unconscious of this; Sonia was with me and that was enough. I had no time to think of what I should say, so what I did say came from my unconscious self, from the heart.

"I want to see you, Sonia," I cried, "and your letter was so cold."

Her eyes did not yield to me. She remarked bitterly:

"I suppose your new friend, Miss Helfmann, told you where you would find me?"

Instead of answering the accusation and confirming her suspicion, I simply thought of clearing myself:

"She is no friend of mine," I replied hotly. "A vulgar Jewess. Since I saw her the second time, I have never been again to the restaurant I

met her in. You cannot have thought that I would care to meet such a creature."

I spoke hotly, but it was warm at my heart that Sonia did care about my intercourse with the Jewess. At once she melted to me, and with the old gesture I loved so much, she stretched out both hands to me, and as I took them and kissed them again and again, she said:

"I believe you; you speak the truth always. How good it is to be able to trust. But now you must really go. You are in danger here."

"Danger," I questioned, "from your friends?"

She flushed to the temples, and I could have kissed her for it.

"Yes," she replied, bravely, "but don't ask me why or wherefore. Promise me that you will never speak of this place again, or of our meeting here. Not to anyone—and I will meet you again. I always meant to give you a meeting," and her eyes rested on mine.

"If that's a promise, Sonia," I said, "I can go on working cheerfully and wait your time."

"It is a promise," she said simply. But I could not part from her like that; as she turned to go I threw my arms around her, and drew her to me, and kissed her on the forehead and on the hair, and said again and again:

"I love you, I love you, I love you, my heart's delight!"

A moment later she had wound herself out of my arms, and with the words, "Remember your promise," had disappeared into the room. The noise ceased as she entered, and as the door closed

everything was still and solitude came about me; but my heart was glad as I went down the stairs, and out into the night. It was dark now and snowing heavily; but what did I care for the darkness and cold; I was in Paradise warmed and lighted and gladdened with hope.

For some time after this meeting I was content and happy; Sonia's warmth to me and her promise to see me again, brightened life for me; but as the days grew to weeks, and the weeks to months, I became despondent. I never fell into the utter misery that possessed me before; I had one consolation now that I had previously lacked—I wrote to her regularly. True, she did not answer me; but I knew that my letters would be a tie between us and so I kept them up. As the weeks grew into months, however, my letters, I am afraid, became rarer.

I noticed now that there were all sorts of rumours of Nihilist conspiracies flying about, but they had little or no effect on the gaieties of the capital, and I paid little heed to them. I read a good deal in the winter evenings, and went a good deal to the theatre. I was amused by the love of dancing shown by this northern people; the ballets in the theatre often lasted the whole evening, and there were sometimes as many as three or four hundred dancers together on the stage. Russia is the only country in Europe in which dancing is still regarded as one of the fine arts. But after all the reading of the modern Russian writers, Tolstoi, Dostoievsky, and Turgenieff, was my chief occupation and pleasure.

One evening, I remember, I had got hold of Tolstoi's "Cossacks," or rather the story had got hold of me. The wish to finish it kept me up late, and I had only closed the book a few moments when a knock came at my door. I called out, and to my astonishment the night porter came in, saying:

"There's a lady for you, sir."

"A lady," I repeated, utterly bewildered. "I don't know any lady. You must be making a mistake."

"Oh, no, he's not," said a voice I knew well, and Sonia passed him and came into the room. There she stood in a great white fur wrap that hid everything except her face. I could not realise it; it was too sudden; I was hardly able to believe my eyes.

She put the hood from off her head, and taking the great fur in both hands threw it backwards from her on a chair: she was in ball dress.

"Have you no welcome for me?" she asked, holding out both her hands. The old familiar gesture brought me to myself and gave me words.

"Welcome!" I said, and took her cold hands in mine and pressed them against my heart, "Welcome!" She smiled as if pleased with my emotion and I went on, "I never knew before, Sonia, why jewellers make their boxes so uncouth and shapeless outside; it is to show off the exquisite beauty of the jewel within; and so with you, you witch! that uncouth great wrap sets off your loveliness!"

And indeed at the moment I was overpowered

with the sense of her physical seduction. The charm of it came over me as a perfume sometimes comes, with such excess of sweetness that it makes one giddy. I could feel my mouth parching as I looked at her.

Suddenly a thought occurred to me—a poisonous thought.

"But this is not the meeting you promised me, is it?" I asked, and I held her from me in sudden dread.

"Yes, dear," she replied, "the only one I could give you without hurting you."

"Hurting me!" I repeated bitterly, all the disappointment of my long solitude welling up in me. "You think a great deal of my suffering, don't you? when a letter from you—three careless lines—would have made me so happy that angels would have envied me, and yet you kept silent and sent me not a word—seventeen weeks and not one little word!"

"Also for fear of hurting you," and the great eyes forced me to believe her though I didn't see how it could be true. "But I have come now and I want to tell you how good your letters were to me, how sweet they were, the only sweet things in my life since I last saw you."

But the fear of her going away was upon me and prevented me giving myself up to the happiness.

"But now," I said, "you will have to go. Your carriage is waiting, of course; it would compromise you if you stayed more than a few moments in a hotel at this time of night."

She drew her hands from me and walked to the fire before she spoke.

"I am cold," she began in a thin toneless voice, "and you make it colder with your little rags of convention. Sometimes I think of you as going about in your baby-clothes. Can you never get rid of them altogether?" and she turned to me with the old imperious accent in her voice. "What do you think I care about compromising myself?" and she laughed. "If you only knew how compromised I am already, you would see that this visit if it ever gets out, instead of blackening me, will shine white against my robe of darkness and death."

"What do you mean?" I asked in fear, taking her hands; for she was too sincere to be theatrical.

"Mean," she repeated in the same strained tone. "I mean that I have come to see you, my lover—so you sign yourself, don't you?—to see you for perhaps the last time—alone at midnight—and you meet me with coldness and tell me I must not compromise myself."

"You don't know what you are saying," I answered; but I interpreted what she said as a challenge and my fevered blood rushed over will and sense. I took her in my arms and drew her to me and covered her face and neck with kisses. A moment afterwards she was holding me from her breathless:

"Be reasonable, be reasonable," she said with a smile, and sat down in the low chair.

"Reasonable," I said, throwing myself on my knees beside her and putting my arms round her

waist. "How do you think I can be reasonable when you tell me that you have come to your lover for perhaps the last time and find him cold. That is not true, Sonia, that is not true. My kisses are still on your neck. Say that it is not true.

"Do you know," I went on, "that I have never seen you before in a low dress? How exquisite you are! Like some strange lily with the white leaves turned back," and I put my lips again on the smooth veined flesh. A moment, and her cool skin fired my blood, and my heart shook me with its beating: "Cold!" I repeated. "Am I cold?"

She lifted my head from her neck, saying, "No, love," beseechingly.

"But how can you call me 'love,'" I said, "and speak of the 'last time'?" and again I drew her to me.

"'Perhaps the last time,'" she corrected me, flushing and still holding my head from her.

"That's the same thing," I said roughly, with a sort of physical exasperation at her restraint. "What do you mean? If you don't explain it or take it back, I will keep you here always and it will indeed be the last time that you will plague me with absence," and I began to caress the restraining arms with my lips.

"Ah," she cried, "be reasonable, George, be reasonable. If you only knew, the fear that you might think worse of me for coming made it difficult to come."

"How could you?" I interrupted; but she shook her head sadly.

"Ah, yes, I could," she replied. "You showed me that in Vienna when I took you to that private room; I saw it in your face, and it hurt me, hurt me. It is always hurting me."

"Forgive me," I cried, overcome with shame and remorse, "forgive me, Sonia! Really I put it out of my mind; it had no effect on me; I never harboured it. One only learns such a nature as yours little by little; forgive me, sweet!"

Even as I spoke I struggled for self-possession and the power to think, and with this same purpose I added:

"But won't your carriage be waiting? Hadn't I better send it home?"

"No," she said, "I came in a droshky. I will go back in it when you are tired of me."

"Tired of you," I repeated, "that will never be. But why do you provoke me," I went on wildly, "when I am half mad and unable to think? Your beauty intoxicates me. Don't you know that I have longed for you and dreamed of you for months? Why do you talk of my being 'tired'?"

"Why," she repeated, "why? That's hard to tell unless you knew all that I know. But do you think it has cost me nothing to keep away from you all these months? All the time I have lived for others and crushed my own heart. Is that nothing? Now I come and let my heart speak for the moment; is that wonderful?" She clasped her hands and went on as if she had caught the clue.

"Is it wonderful," she repeated, starting up, "that one finds it hard to die before one has lived? wonderful that one who gives everything should want to keep one moment for the man she loves? wonderful that one cannot be resolute all through but must be a woman at the last?"

"At the last," I said, as if waking suddenly to something strange and strained in her. "What do you mean?"

"Don't ask me," she replied, still in the same tone of exaltation. "I am mad to-night—or sane, for once—I don't know which or care. One thing's sure; my life is mine now to do as I please with. At last it is mine—or yours if you will."

Her voice played on my nerves like music.

"Do you remember telling me once," she went on, "that to rouse your passion and not satisfy it, was unfair, for it drew out the worst in you? I told you then that I would give you anything—everything, if I were free.

"Now I am free—free as fire or air—and I come to you."

She held out her hands to me, and in my poor brain came the thought, the one thought, that the bond of the flesh would indeed be a bond between us that she could never break, that so she would always return to me and at last be mine. And I took her slowly in my arms and put my lips to hers. . . .

An hour afterwards I was seated in the chair and she was in my arms, and I noticed that her face was pale and thin, and the violet rings about her eyes made my heart weep. I tried to comfort

her by telling her how I would live in Petersburg always and make myself a Russian and do whatever pleased her, and all these sentences I said in Russian carefully to her; but she put her hand on my mouth with infinite tenderness:

"No plans, dear, no plans, and no regrets. The past does not belong to us any more, and the future may never be ours. It is this moment that we own, and it consoles me for everything to feel your arms about me and to know that you are happy. You are, aren't you?"

"More than happy," I said, "if to-day is the beginning of a new life for us, if you will be my wife and give yourself to me for ever."

"'For ever,'" she repeated, in a tone drenched with emotion, "our 'for ever' is but a moment, and yet it repays me for all I have suffered and for all I may suffer still," and she put her hand through my hair in a caress.

What could I say? Her words brought tears of joy to my eyes, and yet made me feel divinely humble. I lifted her from me and slipped down beside her on my knees with my arms still about her—that was my place I felt—and then I drew down her eyes and kissed them again and again, with my heart now, and not my lips alone.

And so we sat for a long time, speaking, I think, but little, and yet getting to know each other more and more intimately with the mysterious divination of love.

Suddenly there came a sound in the hotel: the night was gone; some one on my floor was being

called for an early train, and as soon as she heard the noise Sonia started to her feet:

"I must go!"

"Go!" I said, "but let me go with you; I must see you home."

"No, no!" she cried, "you must not;" but I persisted.

"Why not, Sonia?"

She turned to me with her whole face shaken and her eyes brimming over. The sadness in her face was despairing.

"You must not question me, dear one; I have no explanations to give. I only want you to know one thing, to put it in your soul, as it is in mine—that I owe you all the sweetness of my life."

She put her arms about my neck, and in her eyes . . . there was the love that is stronger than death. I took her down to the door of the hotel. As soon as the door opened on the dull gray morning a droshky that had evidently been on the look out, whirled up and in a moment she had gone and I was alone.

The next two or three days passed in a dream with me. I wrote to Sonia in the morning saying that I would have to see her again at once, that I could not live without her, and that I was determined to share her fate, whatever it might be. I added that if I did not hear from her, I should seek her till I found her. The afternoon of the same day brought me a note. The porter told me that an isvostchik had left it and gone away at once. It was from Sonia and just like her; here it is:

"Dear Heart,

"You must not see me. I do not wish it. You shall hear from me soon.

Yours till death,

"SONIA."

Two or three days later I came down to lunch rather late. I had been conscious for a little while that there was an unusual hurrying and scurrying about in the hotel, but I was so wrapped up in my own feelings and hopes that I paid little attention to it all. When I got down to the restaurant, I found everything in confusion. Waiters came into the room and went out again quickly, and though, strange to say, there was no one but myself to serve, they did not attend to me. Three several times I gave my order and the waiter took it, went away and never came back. At last I got up, caught a half-scared waiter by the ear, and said to him in Russian:

"What's the matter? Have you all lost your wits?"

"No, sir," he replied, "but the Tsar is dead, they say."

"What, man?" I cried, "what do you mean?"

It was true. The head-waiter came in, and in a moment told me the whole tragedy—the Tsar had been out driving; on his way back to the Winter Palace bombs had been thrown which had blown his horses and himself to pieces.

"And the throwers?" I asked.

His eyebrows went up. "The police have one,"

he said, " and they are searching. They say it is the Nihilists. . . ."

Half an hour afterwards, a note was brought to me from Green, asking me to come to the Embassy at once. I went, and found him in a state of consternation; and yet he could not help saying what everyone was saying, " the greatest crime of the century." Green was sure to make his way in diplomacy—his thoughts kept the common road: everyone would be pleased with him.

" It is terrible," I said, " but what has it all to do with me? "

" Much," he replied quickly. " Some time ago the police came here to find out about you, to find out if you were favourably known to us. Of course, we told them that you were all right; but they came back a couple of days ago and said "—he began turning over some papers till at last he found a slip on which some memoranda were scribbled—" that you were known to be in communication with Nihilists, notably with a Jewess, one Helfmann, and that you should be warned." He threw down the paper and went on. " The moment I got the news of this tragedy, I sent for you to tell you. I think you had better take this despatch box and go to Berlin with it at once as one of our messengers."

" Not I," I replied. " I have done nothing wrong."

" Mere suspicion now," he said, " would put you in prison for a year, and we could not help you. Believe me, you must go. I cannot tell you all my reasons, but you must leave Petersburg to-night."

His insistence was so peculiar, so menacing, that I told him at last I would take his advice; and I did.

But first I wrote to Sonia and told her what had befallen me and gave her my address, begging her to write. I left Petersburg that evening, and I left it not a moment too soon. The next day it would have been impossible to leave without a special permit countersigned by the chief of police; and he would never have given it to me.

That was an exciting time in Berlin, and, I suppose, all over the civilized world. Men talked of nothing and read of nothing but the great tragedy, and every detail that came to hand only increased the public interest. Everyone felt that this crime was like no other crime; it was not the deed of one or two monomaniacs; there were dozens implicated in it, and in spite of numberless spies and detectives, a whole government organized for defence, nothing had been suspected, nothing had leaked out. Yet one day we read that had the Tsar returned to his palace by another route, the whole street would have gone into the air with him—the whole of Garden Street had been undermined from side to side and turned into a huge magazine. A little later we heard that the assassins were all volunteers—the picked and chosen out of forty-seven who had offered themselves for the work; and a little later still came the news that two days before the assassination, three of the murderers had actually rehearsed the crime. They had dared to go through the police-crowded streets of Petersburg to a piece of waste land on the out-

skirts of the town and there throw one of the five-inch tin bombs in order to study what its effect would be. The imagination was palsied by such facts.

The later conduct of these conspirators was no less extraordinary. One hundred and fifty accused and not a single informer! Not a single person who tried to save his own life at the expense of his fellows! And everyone knew enough of the methods of Russian prisons to know that neither punishment nor reward was spared to win betrayal and make conviction sure. Scenes to shake the soul; on the one side mind-torture, planned and perfect; on the other, silence.

"You met so-and-so at such-and-such a place?" questioned the magistrate. "We know it. You were dressed as a workman; he was dressed as an artisan. You see we know everything. Admit it and you shall go free."

A smile was the answer. The most astonishing thing was that these criminals would tell of themselves freely; they seemed indeed to court death; but not a word to hurt their fellows.

And so by these individual confessions little by little we came to the heart of the matter and learned that it was a woman, a mere girl, who had been the soul of the conspiracy; the master-spirit who drew the others to her and inflamed them with her own white heat of purpose; and bit by bit we were enabled to reconstruct the last scene.

The place was the bridge leading over the Catherine Canal. On the rise of the bridge itself as on a platform whence she could see and be seen,

the girl took her stand; below her were her three assistants, Risakoff, Elnikoff, and another. The girl was to wave her pocket handkerchief, as the death signal.

Suddenly the horses and the closed carriage surrounded by its escort of Cossacks, appeared whirling towards the bridge. The handkerchief fluttered, and at once Risakoff threw his bomb. It smashed the hinder part of the carriage and killed a Cossack and a moujik who happened to be standing near. The hind wheels being blown away, the carriage fell and stopped the horses. A moment after, the Tsar opened the door and stepped out unhurt. Seeing the Cossack and the moujik lying in their blood on the ground, he was overpowered by the sense of his own escape and cried, "Thank God."

At this moment, Risakoff, who had been seized by some of the bystanders, was heard to say: "It is too soon to thank God yet." The same instant the handkerchief fluttered again, and Elnikoff rushed forward, lifted his hands high above his head and hurled his bomb down between himself and the Emperor. He was blown to pieces; the Tsar's limbs were shattered. The awful sight turned the third murderer to pity; he shoved his bomb into his pocket and helped to lift the dying monarch into a sledge. Oh wonderful heart of man that includes in itself all contradictions! In one moment this assassin became a nurse at the risk of his life. Meanwhile the girl, seeing her work was done, walked on over the bridge and disappeared among the crowd—to give her-

self up three days afterwards in the Nevski Prospekt.

As I read all this, the blood ebbed from my heart and left me gasping. The simplicity of the signal, the deadly resolution, filled me with a fear which I did not dare to put into words. I was relieved when I read later that the girl-chief was supposed to be the mistress of the peasant Jelaboff, and that her name was Lydia Voinoff.

But a day or two later still we heard that she was not the only woman implicated, that there were two women among the six who were put on their trial for murder before the High Court of the Senate, and that the second woman was a Jewess, one Hetty Helfmann. With that name a weight of fear came on me, crushing me, and I was afraid to think; yet without conscious thinking my fear took form and went with me everywhere.

I scarcely dared to go out. I was waiting for news—"news," that horrible word—in my room, when the door opened and a man came in without ceremony of any kind.

"What do you want?" I asked in astonishment.

He took off his rough cap as he answered: "You don't remember me!"

It was Michailoff.

"Yes," I said, conscious of hate and anger; "I remember you perfectly." And I did. I could see the bare room and the wisps of smoke blown through it and the crowd of men, and Sonia standing with her back to me—I remembered everything, even to the dirt the men's boots had brought into the room and left on the bare boards.

But the man had altered. This was not the smiling face and the little moustache with its handsome upward curl. He had shaved moustache and beard: the eyes were different too; they were without light or steadiness. What was it that made me avoid them? Was the man mad? He seemed to resent either my manner or my scrutiny; but he came forward without speaking and threw himself heavily into a chair.

"I am done," he said, "I have not eaten for days nor slept for a week. Give me food and drink."

The remains of my lunch were on the table. As I went to the bell he stopped me.

"Don't ring," he said. "This will do;" and he turned and began to eat, while I poured out wine for him.

When he had finished, he took up a cigarette; then leaned back in the chair and began to smoke.

"Do you know?" he began quietly, "I meant to kill you, once. How silly it all seems now, how unreal! I have come from Petersburg to see you; to hear you speak; to find out what it is that made such a woman love you! You are tall and strong and clean; but that's all I can see—and that's not enough."

"Did you come here to tell me that?" I asked him.

"No," he replied quietly, "no, I came here as a messenger to answer whatever you had to ask and to give you a letter."

"Give it me," I said, holding out my hand; and after a moment of what I took to be hesitation he

handed me a letter. It was from Sonia. I opened it and read the first line at a glance:

"When you get this, I shall be dead, my lover."

I stood with the letter in my hand and felt my heart stop.

"What does it mean?" My voice startled me, it was so small and thin.

"Mean," he answered, "it means that you were loved by the greatest woman in the world—you! It means that she adored you—she whom we all worshipped and now she is dead—Sophia Perovskaia."

Then it was true; I was not surprised; I seemed to have known it always; but I could not think.

"Ah, the sacred name!" he went on, "the sacred name!"

"Tell me about her," I interrupted him. "Tell me about it. What did she do?"

"Do," he said, "do. Good God! he did not even know her."

"What did she do?" he cried after a pause. "I will tell you. She was the soul of our movement; she foresaw everything; organized everything; and at the last, directed everything. Ah, she chose her instruments well."

My whole being woke to hate of him and his theatrical speech.

"And you?" I said. "She chose you as a messenger!" and I laughed.

He dropped into the chair and put his face in his hands.

"No," he said, after a pause; "she sent me out of Petersburg at the critical time, persuading

me that my brain and tongue alone could do some work in Moscow that had to be done, and so I escaped the police; but when I came back, and I came back as soon as I heard the news, it was too late to do anything for her or the others. I found she had left a letter for you; no one seemed to know you, so I took it and followed you here. I don't know why now—with some wish, I think, to hurt you. But I have no such wish now. I can think of nothing but her—and you're right, she despised me!"

"Tell me of her," I heard myself saying.

"Have you heard of the end?" he asked.

"No," I said in rage; "how could I have heard?"

"That's true," he said. "I have come straight through," and he began hurriedly, as if he liked to tell of it, and his rhetoric hardly ever left him.

"It was awful and beautiful too. There were crowds and crowds of people; the ten thousand soldiers were but a thin wall to keep the ocean of people back. There was the black scaffold—two poles and a crossbar and five rings with dangling halters. We waited for hours. The snow and ice on the plain had melted under the hot sun, and been churned to mud by the myriad feet. One shivered and burned in turns.

"Suddenly we saw the two tumbrils, high upon the first Risakoff and Jelaboff, and in the next the other three, Sonia in the middle—the one divine thing in the world, with her smiling pale face and God-illumined eyes!

"All of them in black—black robes, black caps;

great placards on their breasts, 'Murderers of the Tsar!' The good Tsar," he added bitterly, "the Tsar who cried 'Thank God,' when he saw his Cossacks and moujiks lying dead and thought he had escaped!

"When they unbound them on the platform I could see her walk about cheering each of them, kissing them, encouraging them, but no one could hear what she said for the noise of the drums. Yet her courage lifted the soul and made the place sacred! Then one after the other they mounted the stool. . . . I see her hanging still! . . . As I came away everyone was crying, the soldiers and the people alike—everyone. And now," he added, "I am worse than dead. There is nothing for me to hope for in the world—nothing."

He rose and left the room, and I let him go, for I wanted to be alone with my love and her last words to me. Here is her letter:

"When you get this I shall be dead, my lover. Dead, the word looks strange; and yet all it means is simply rest and sleep, and I am tired, tired and worse than tired.

"Ever since I left you, I have been in doubt, wondering always whether it would not be better to leave the work undone and just go back and lie in your arms again and feel your kisses on my face.

"It was not only the temptation of your love that tortured me, but fear, too—an awful fear! Do you remember once saying to me that ideas were better than deeds, that deeds had always some of the dirt of the world on them? How true that

is! and how terrible! Since I left you I have been in the dirt and I shall never be clean again; though my heart loathes it; but still the thing had to be done and that must be enough for me.

"I could not do anything else, dear. I was not made to do anything else; I could not have lived a great life; the slow hours would have broken me. I see that now clearly.

"I want to say one thing to you before I go, love; one thing that is sure where everything else breaks and changes.

"You always compared society to a pyramid, do you remember? and said that the base of it must rest in the mud. It isn't true, dear; we will lift the pyramid by putting our own breasts under it. It may crush us, but others will follow the example —that is sure!

"You will not increase the weight of the pyramid for us; but lighten it and help to lift it, my lover.

"And now, dear. . . ."

But I can copy no more; the rest of the letter belongs to me alone, for the loss is mine.

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